DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

'It's Aboot Justice and Journey'

Community Development Practitioners' Perspectives Reveal Insights on Practice in Scotland

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Declaration

I Jean McEwan-Short hereby declare that:

- I am the sole author of this thesis
- All references cited have been consulted by me
- The work of which this thesis is a record is mine and mine alone
- This thesis has not been previously submitted or accepted for a higher degree

J. McEwan-Short

14/7/21

Abstract

Community development is commonly described as contested practice, it is defined in many nuanced ways and there are challenges across the literature encouraging practitioners to engage more fully with critical thinking and transformative intent. The aim of this inquiry was to investigate community development practitioners' perspectives on their practice in Scotland. Using an interpretivist framework, the research was designed to foreground the participants' voices as experts on their own practice. Dyadic dialogical interviews were developed and used as community development inspired research methods and the participants' perspectives are presented as dialogues interspersed with my analysis. The dialogues present community development practitioners who are highly reflective critical thinkers, articulate about the conceptual underpinnings of their approaches and fully aware of the socio-political contexts they are operating in. A complex picture is revealed of community development as clear, courageous, caring, critical, politically motivated practice that is grounded in ideological thinking, respect for people's agency, and in mutual striving for transformative social change. The participants demonstrated a healthy awareness of limitations to practice and of the weight they carry in their engagement with the somewhat grand expectations of community development. Nonetheless the predominant thread throughout is of hopeful practice driven by an enduring commitment to tackling social inequalities and to striving to make society a better place combined with a profound belief this is possible. There is a sense of community development being portrayed as fragile practice in a context dominated by service provision and the conclusion is that it needs cared for as dynamic practice that has an important role to play in striving for positive social change.

Introduction

The aim of this inquiry is to illuminate community development practice by foregrounding practitioners' perspectives on their approaches to their practice. With community development commonly described as contested practice and defined in many nuanced ways, there are challenges across the literature encouraging practitioners to engage more fully with critical thinking and theoretical bases (Meade, Shaw & Banks 2016; Ledwith 2011; Craig 2007). In this context my interest lay in engaging with the voices of practitioners to see what their perspectives might illuminate about community development. The results demonstrate engaged practice grounded in political and ideological thinking with transformative intentions. There was a healthy awareness of limitations to practice and significantly, of the weight the participants carry, in their engagement with the somewhat grand expectations of community development.

I utilised dialogue to explore how community development workers articulate and define their practice; what drives their thinking, why they approach their practice in the way they do and to what end. My reading of hooks' (2003) dialogues and of Freire in conversation with Shor (Shor & Freire 1987) and with Horton (Bell, Gaventa & Peters 1990), provided the catalyst for my innovative use of dialogue as research methods. I introduce dyadic dialogical interviewing both as research method and with potential as a reflective tool to critique practice.

The thesis is written in four chapters. Chapter one presents a literature-based discussion of perspectives relevant to community development. It provides a pathway into how my inquiry situates within the world of community development theory and practice. Across the literature community development is presented as transformative values-driven process,

practice, a profession, an academic discipline and as activism. It is complex and is commonly described as contested practice. The nature of community development as contested practice is therefore a significant driver for this research since the shared meanings around the values and broad intentions of community development are peppered by nuances in the way it is defined and practiced. My conclusion in this realm of contested practice is that the differences matter, but more importantly they reveal the ongoing need to investigate the nature, scope, and intentions of community development, through the lens of those who practice it.

Chapter two introduces the overall research framework with an analysis of the methodology and methods used and the case for framing this study as a qualitative inquiry. I discuss the role of dialogue in the research methods utilised and introduce dyadic dialogical interviewing. I explore my positionality as researcher and discuss epistemological and ontological concerns. I also present the influence of community development values, and the democratisation of research, on the study design.

Chapter three is the presentation of data as sections of dialogue interspersed with my analysis revealing a picture of each dyad's perspectives on their practice. The dialogues are presented using the participants' voices, quoting them directly in order to remain as true as possible to their narratives and to how they represented their experiences in dialogue with each other. My analysis bounces off their words and by using relevant literature as 'outside authority' alongside the authority of their voiced practice experiences, I demonstrate what the dialogues sparked in my thinking and present their words in dialogue with my analysis. In this way, I present the data under emergent themes, as sections of dialogue interspersed with my analysis and a picture of each dialogue with its key thematic messages is revealed.

This chapter is in four parts with each of the four dialogues presented and analysed separately. Each dialogue stands alone with key messages concluded. However, they also build into each other and my narrative weaves through and connects them, revealing joint messages that are presented in the subsequent chapter. The dialogues are presented in the following order:

- Dialogue 1: It's About Accountability - the participants discuss their roles in community development and housing across a Scottish city.
- Dialogue 2: Contradictory Space – the participants discuss their work based in geographical communities in a Scottish city.
- Dialogue 3: Justice and Journey – the participants discuss their work focussed on building community with young people in a Scottish city.
- Dialogue 4: Bringing Realities to the Fore – the participants discuss their project-based work with women involved in prostitution.

It is worthy of note that some of the dialogues are spoken using Scots and a glossary is provided in Appendix 1.

Chapter four is the final and concluding chapter. It reveals insights into community development practice as well as a critique of the research framework, including its limitations. Key elements of community development practice as revealed by the dialogues are proffered. Moreover, dyadic dialogical interviewing is presented as a significant research method as well as a tool for ongoing critique of community development practice.

CHAPTER 1: Key Themes from Literature

Introduction

This chapter presents a literature-based analysis of perspectives relevant to community development and to this thesis. Specifically, the literature review provides a pathway into how my inquiry situates within the world of community development theory and practice. My approach is grounded in the belief that an understanding of the literature can inspire useful inquiries, and lead to articulating a reasoned need for the research, but that it can also act as catalyst for ongoing analysis. Much as Kumar (2014:48) suggests this means the literature review offers a 'valuable contribution to almost every operational step' of the research inquiry.

In order to investigate perspectives on community development from practitioners' perspectives the review of literature required an analysis of what constitutes community development, and how it is defined, as a central premise. I therefore introduce and critique different definitions of community development and this leads to an unfolding of the nuances in meanings and intentions of community development as presented across the literature. These differences further reveal contestations that are significant to the defining, and practicing, of community development and consequently discussion of its contested nature is a central theme in this chapter and a key driver for this research. What follows is therefore a critique of how the literature points to contestations in the very nature of community development and how that is inextricably linked to criticisms of it as vague practice.

The unpacking of the supposition that contestations equal nebulous practice opens a journey of curiosity through the literature to the importance of conceptual underpinnings to community development and relatedly, the context within which practice takes place. This

includes conceptual meanings of community and differences therein. Accordingly, in order to investigate apparent contestations literature on definitions, conceptual underpinnings, and the intentions of community development in a context of social inequalities form a central part of this analysis.

Furthermore, ideological foundations to practice are revealed as important to the nature of practice and this leads to feminist influences, also specifically to Freire's (1972) thinking, notably around the impact on community development as critical and transformative practice. Consequently, literature on community development inspired by feminist thinking forms a central part of the analysis alongside literature motivated by Freirean thinking and this feeds a Freirean-feminist lens. Relatedly, I focus on dialogue as a values-led concept that has a central place in community development practice (Westoby 2019; Freire 2016), and I introduce its equally central role to this inquiry. Literature that critiques dialogue therefore has an integral part to play in this chapter and throughout the thesis.

I conclude that the representations of community development as contested present a reasoned need for ongoing research into community development practice. Moreover I suggest that these contestations are a significant driver for this research since the literature reveals that shared meanings around the values and broad intentions of community development are peppered by nuances in the way it is defined and practiced (Emejulu 2015; Craig, Mayo, Popple, Shaw & Taylor 2011; Bhattacharyya 2009). My conclusion about the contested nature of community development, is therefore that the differences matter, but more so they reveal the ongoing need to investigate the nature, scope, and intentions of community development, through the lens of those who practice it.

Approach to literature review

Ridley (2012) acknowledges that there are many approaches to reviewing literature with none more important that the other. Onwuegbuzie, Leech & Collins (2012:6) point to the lengthy history of the literature review and state that despite its longevity it remains 'somewhat underdeveloped'. They lament it is often used solely as a stepping-stone towards the real research, something to endure in order to find questions or gaps to move forwards from. Boote and Biele (2005) concur and suggest literature analysis is often given short shrift in theses resulting in a general lack of sophisticated reviews. In such a context it is relevant to note that the literature review in this inquiry takes a significant place throughout the thesis.

Creswell (2003:86) points to a five-step process to literature review that involves identifying search terms, finding the literature, reading it for relevance, organizing it and writing it up and this did offer a useful initial framework for my review and a way into the vast world of community development literature. However, Boote and Biele (2005) criticise this approach as a limited linear process that lacks analysis and synthesis arguing that critique is a crucial aspect of the review of literature. They suggest the 'mechanical process of summarizing a supposedly exhaustive collection of prior studies' (2005:7) is both limited and unnecessarily a more common approach adopted for literature review. Relatedly Thomas and James (2006) point to false hierarchies in academia that mean the linear systematic literature review is wrongly respected above any other method.

These perspectives were useful both in freeing up and expanding my thinking since part of learning my craft as researcher involved studying different approaches to, and aims of, literature review methodologies. Consequently May, Pope & Popay's (2005) contention that a narrative review of literature allows for an analysis of a topic in a fluid manner rather than in a linear fashion was important. The fluidity of narrative reviewing helps elucidate my

approach to the literature review and how I used it partly as an introduction and stepping-stone into my inquiry, but not exclusively. Rather, literature has a significant place throughout this thesis, conceptually in order to define the nature of the inquiry and the research framework, for ongoing analysis, and notably in the presentation of the data, as Kumar (2014) advises. This chapter is therefore in line with Hart's (2018) suggestion of literature review as a critical synthesis of relevant literature and for this inquiry that means in relation to perspectives on community development.

Kumar (2014:49) usefully explains that 'literature review involves a paradox' and by this he means that a pre-existing certain level of understanding of the 'problem' is needed but also that 'the process of reviewing the literature helps you to understand the subject area better and thus helps you to conceptualise your research problem clearly'. It also helps form an iterative process in which literature plays a critical part throughout. Indeed, I had pre-existing knowledge and I began with literature I was familiar with. This involved key contemporary Scottish and United Kingdom-based community development writers such as Banks, Barr, Beck & Purcell, Craig, Dominelli, Emejulu, Gilchrist, Hashagen, Ledwith, Mayo, McConnell, Popple and Shaw. This was clearly just an opener to the literature albeit an important one and I used the snowballing technique to build from their work outwards (Ridley 2012).

Cognisant of Emejulu's (2015) criticisms of a hegemony of literature in community development, I also used search engines and engaged with key word searches along with the Boole technique of using statements (Ridley 2012), thus broadening out my net both locally and globally. Searches included 'community', 'development', 'community development', 'community development values', 'community development transformative practice' and they opened curiosity around how community development is defined, discussed ideologically, critiqued as politically motivated or service-based, framed as radical and ameliorative, influenced by Freirean thinking, by feminism, grounded in equalities and by

the values of social justice and mutuality. I focussed mostly, though not entirely, on post-2000 work, allowing for an analysis of the more contemporary writings. Certain pre-2000 writers are crucial to my analysis, notably hooks and Freire, because contemporary community development writers lead us directly to their work. However, it is also evident that many contemporary UK writers on community development have been writing since the 1990s and before, and their work from then has relevance to their work today. Furthermore, although much of the literature I sourced is United Kingdom based, this is in no way exclusive since community development as global practice has much to learn from, and mutually inform, global perspectives. Searches therefore took my analysis to writers, for example, in China, USA, Australia, Ireland and across Europe, Africa, South America and India and to international frameworks and perspectives on community development. The more global writers open my thinking and recognise community development as global practice, but they also importantly lay challenge to my possible ethnocentric bias.

This process underpinned my critique of the literature, enabled me to develop my conceptual framework and to strengthen my Freirean-feminist lens, and resulted in defining the literature review themes as:

- Ways community development is defined
- Conceptual influences on community development
- Contested practice
- Community
- The context of community development
- Transformative
- Community development and dialogue.

Notwithstanding, whilst the journey with the literature introduces these key themes in this chapter it also continues throughout, and I utilise further works in response to the picture unfolding from the research participants' perspectives. As Seal & Frost (2014:150) suggest this approach is situated in the epistemological perspective that 'knowledge is a dynamic evolving force'. It allows for a broadened 'understanding of what literature reviewing entails' (Boote & Biele 2005:4) and a freedom to adapt the literature review so that it is fit for purpose for this inquiry. In this way, the thesis unfolds using an analysis of the literature as an ongoing and integral part of the narrative (Silverman 2011). Led by a Freirean-feminist lens and responding to the participants' dialogues, I build and revisit the literature in this chapter but also introduce more in the data analysis.

Thus, this chapter presents an analysis of literature pertaining to community development including contemporary Scottish and UK writers combined with global writers. By discussing perspectives on community development and its many contestations I conclude that there is a pressing need to research its nature through the lens of community development practitioners. Firstly however, true to the nature of this inquiry a brief contextual account of community development in Scotland is worthwhile as it at once introduces the setting for the participants' practice and the dilemmas that underpin the need for this inquiry.

Community development in Scotland

The focus of this research on perspectives of participants who are involved in community development in Scotland deserves some contextual analysis. Scotland has a notable history in community development and some lay claim to it enjoying a significant place on the global stage (CLD Standards Council Scotland n.d; Cooke 1995; Dickie 1968). Pointedly, Hashagen (2017:347) suggests that community development is 'in many ways seen to be strongly embedded in Scottish thinking and culture' and he points to its global influences with

the International Association for Community Development being 'based in Scotland…[and that] European community development organisations look to Scotland as having a leading role in policy and practice'. The global emphasis has contemporary significance but also a somewhat bleak historical colonial context, and much as Craig, Mayo, Popple, Shaw and Taylor (2011:26) suggest a, 'colonial community education tradition was to remain influential in Scotland' even in the 1970s. Scotland is not alone in this and the challenges, and regrets, of the colonial history of community development are revisited in different places throughout this thesis.

Writing about community development as in 'its early stages' in Scotland, Dickie (1968:175) also points to 'years of shared experience at international level' but the emphasis here is on the resulting adoption of five guiding principles of,

> concern for the community as a whole…concern for development as a whole…maximum participation by the people themselves…help from outside the community…[and] a marriage of local to national interests.

Notably, Dickie elaborates that community development is '*with* people, not *for* people…men…women and young people' (author's emphasis) (*ibid*). It is interesting also to note that in 1968 Dickie was highlighting the mostly rural focus of community development whilst recommending its applicability be further developed to urban areas. Notwithstanding, Dickie's representation of community development with an equalities' focus (albeit limited), and with action in and beyond community, has reverberations today that are expanded on below.

There are different peak points of historical influence on community development practice in Scotland. Barr (1987) points to significant developments of the Local Government (Scotland)

Act 1973, that led to the creation of Strathclyde Regional Council as the biggest local authority area in the country, suggesting this found community development being integrated into local council policy within social work, and assuming a strong place. Barr is not alone in highlighting the importance of this approach (Bryant & Bryant 1982; Craig *et al* 2011), indeed, Cooke (1995:203) describes Strathclyde as the then 'biggest employer of community workers in Europe'. This time also saw the publication of the Alexander Report (HMSO 1975) highlighting the educational aspects of community development with a focus on supporting communities to tackle problems affecting them. Hashagen (2017:347) suggests that community development then enjoyed a strong embedment in local authorities throughout the 1980s and 1990s with the 'more strategic regional councils, embracing its values and approaches as a cornerstone of social, educational and economic development'. However, Cooke (1995) highlights the ensuing years of Conservative administration seeing a 'steady centralisation of government, decision-making and resource allocation, making it increasingly difficult for community groups to respond to issues at local level'. A complex, hopeful but precarious picture of community development at the time is revealed that again has bearings today.

Accordingly, change came about and Hashagen (2017:347) points to a 'curious and contradictory path' for community development in Scotland, suggesting local government reorganisation in 1996 found 'new Councils abandoned or seriously reduced their commitment to community development'. Ross (2017) concurs referring to the policy developments in the early post-devolution 2000s that found the renewed Community Learning and Development (CLD) 'bring together the best of what has been done under the banners of 'community education' and 'community development'' but with the national priorities described as 'achievement through learning for adults…achievement through learning for young people…[and] achievement through building community capacity (Scottish Executive 2004:1). The omission of community development is palpable but

granted, there was a focus on community planning. Nonetheless, Ross (2017:32) suggests this resulted in a reduction of local authority support for community development, an expansion of third sector activities and a preponderance of fixed-term projects. The insidious nature of neoliberalism and the marketisation of welfare provision was creeping in bumping alongside the language of social justice that we still see influencing practice today (Craig 2011; Shaw 2004). There is indeed a sense of community development being at the mercy of policy developments and whether they are politically conducive to practice or not.

Notwithstanding, this period simultaneously saw a growth in writings about the Scottish experience of community development with the launch of the journal Concept (Mayo 1996) and the subsequent foregrounding of Scottish practice. This Scottish critical writing space was an important development and Shaw and Cooke (1996:1) set the scene for ongoing debate on the nature and intentions of community development, that remain pertinent today, as:

> The product of two sets of forces and interests which reflect the changing context of political relations in society. The first is pressure from below, which stems broadly from democratic aspiration, the other from above, reflecting the changing needs of the state and broader political interests.

This potential dichotomy is important and building from that Barr (2014) points to the very challenges of community development practice that stem from the differences between community-led democratic voice and policy-imposed directives. Whilst the two need not be mutually exclusive, they often are, and Barr highlights the need for sophisticated practice that recognises and works with this difference. He also suggests that community development can often lean more towards continuity than transformation and he is undoubtedly not alone (Barr 1987; Martin 1987). Interestingly this represents one of the

enduring aspects of community development practice in Scotland, that it remains dual, multi-faceted and contested (Shaw 2004).

The ensuing Scottish writings on community development are integrated into the literature review since they play an important part in community development discourse and practice, and in theorising community development alongside the global and UK literature. That said, it is important to acknowledge a further significant policy development in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 (Scottish Government 2015) that has at once brought possibilities for community ownership and transfer of assets with a strong role for community development alongside the irony of heavy responsibilities placed on community members within a context of rolling back the state. Again, this is a significant thread in the literature review.

Finally, in terms of practice in Scotland CLD remains the Scottish Government's name of choice for community work and the CLD Standards Council Scotland (CLDSC) is the professional body for community workers. That said, it is currently the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) that lays claim to the status as lead organisation for community development across Scotland. Markedly there are discrepancies, the CLDSC equates community development with community capacity building (CLDSC n.d.) however SCDC state that community development in practice:

> supports communities, of place and identity, to use their own assets to improve the quality of community life…[and] helps communities and public agencies to work together to improve services and the way in which decisions are made' (SCDC n.d.).

Additionally, the Community Development Alliance Scotland (CDAS) is a network organisation that states community development is 'an approach to achieving social change'

and The Scottish Community Development Network (SCDN) portrays the key purpose of community development work as, ‘collectively to bring about social change and justice, by working with communities…in ways which challenge oppression and tackle inequalities’ (SCDN n.d.). Overall, there are different network bodies with similar but different perspectives on community development and Hashagen points to contestations in practice in Scotland:

> on the ground, very few organisations (either public or third sector) are to be found doing the basic neighbourhood work or community work at the core of community development. We need to unravel some of these contradictions’ (Hashagen (2017:72).

In many ways Hashagen’s words speak to the need for this research and what follows in terms of literature review is an unravelling of different contestations around community development and a complex world of theory and practice that provide a catalyst for this inquiry.

Ways community development is defined

Community development discourse is peppered with varying definitions (Banks 2019; Gilchrist & Taylor 2011; Craig 2007). Whilst Shaw and Mayo (2016:3) describe it as having a ‘plurality of meanings and usages’, Toomey (2009) offers eight different ways community development can be defined and Schuften (1996) points to four. Not only are there numerous different definitions of community development, there are also significant differences in representations of what constitutes community development and it is commonly suggested that different interpretations fuel differing practices (Ife 2016). Bhattacharyya (2004:7) is critical of this and laments:

> Indeed, a surfeit of statements purporting to be definitions have been published each slightly differently worded in an idiosyncratic frenzy with no explanation as to why the particular terms were chosen.

Ife (2016) points to variations in broad terms of usage suggesting that community development is utilised interchangeably with community work, community practice, youth and community work, community activism and capacity building. His observations are useful however these terms are all broad definitions of practice and are also contested. That said, it is often the case that community development as process is part of the range of practices he refers to as it underpins the different practice approaches (Popple 2015; Beck & Purcell 2010). Similarly, Meade, Shaw and Banks (2016:3) suggest the term community practice partially embraces community development and they propose that terms such as '*local development, rural extension, participatory development, community work and community organising'* (their emphasis) are also often referred to synonymously with community development. Evidently this creates a wide bank of possibilities for what constitutes community development and how we understand what it is.

It is common for writers on community development to foreground their perspective on it and to offer a definition they work to or indeed to create one. This might take the form of a broad statement offering meanings or providing a formal definition of their own. Equally, it can be a quoting, and adopting, of another writer's perspective, or the introduction of an existing definition created by networks or professional bodies. This means that there are numerous definitions available to choose from throughout the literature with overlaps and differences apparent. It also means that most writers acknowledge the complex nature of community development and the need to explain what it is in some way. In such a diverse context, a

discussion of how community development is defined is therefore a necessary and useful exercise.

Some perspectives on community development are broad and point to overarching processes. Indeed, the United Nations (1955: n.p.) agreed a definition of community development as:

> a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and the fullest possible reliance on the community's initiative.

This definition is still referred to in contemporary literature but not as a definitive description, rather as a catalyst for further discussion and analysis (Gilchrist 2019; Meade *et al* 2016). The strong focus on processes of community-led action with a view to impacting positively on community, highlighted by this definition, remains prevalent today as Barr (2014:4) suggests:

> successful community development is ultimately driven by the application of the skills and knowledge that people within communities, release or develop.

There tends however to be more emphasis on striving for wider social and political impact both in, and out with, communities in more recent definitions (Ledwith 2020; Banks 2019; Kenny 2016). The focus on creating conditions of economic and social progress remains but with more nuanced references to the complexities of transformative change and the diversity of communities. Banks (2019:7) suggests that community development as a term is used in different ways to describe different kinds of actions that generally 'relate to people acting

collectively in communities of place, interest or identity to achieve transformative social change'. Bhattacharyya (2004:15) concurs and espouses that community development embraces 'a willingness to engage in collective effort to create and sustain a caring society'. Though having similarities, these are also broad definitions that remain open to levels of interpretation. Likewise, with a clear and meaningful but broad perspective, Ledwith (2011:284-5) suggests:

> practice is inspired by a vision of social and environmental justice...[and] is fundamentally committed to bring about social change which contributes to this end.

Clearly these are short quotes that are contextualised and expanded upon by the writers, and in doing so demonstrate that defining community development tends to be a detailed and lengthy exercise. It also unveils nuances and different emphases from different writers as some highlight community development principles, some the values or the aims, and others the process or the skills.

Shahid and Jha (2016:95) agree that community development needs to embrace social justice, but along with Garcia-Lamarca (2017a), they also include human rights and go on to state that it is:

> a professional practice that enjoins practitioners to make sense of oppressive sociocultural realities and to promote anti-hegemonic community development.

Their use of 'enjoins' is significant and points to the strong values-base that demands action grounded in an understanding of social inequalities and their ramifications. However, once

again the breadth of possible understandings and interpretations of their definition illustrates some of the contemporary challenges to defining community development. Notably, Shahid and Jha (2016) are pointing to community development as a profession and thereby raising one of the dilemmas for definitions, whether it is a profession and/or a process of engagement. They state that community development demands an approach from practitioners that is grounded in an understanding of social inequalities and structural power in society and the need to take action to change oppressive processes that result in the marginalisation of certain communities. Their reference to the influence of Gramsci (1975) on community development is noteworthy in that many writers point to the need, for community workers and people in communities, to understand and challenge hegemonic forces that result in accepted, destructive common sense assumptions in society (Ledwith 2020; Gilchrist 2019; Popple 2015; Shaw 2011a).

Taking the above quotes together, we begin to see community development defined as both a process and professional practice that aims for positive community and social change, grounded in an adherence to certain values, committed to social and environmental justice and human rights, and crucially as engaged mutual counter-hegemonic action. Community development is being defined as purpose, intention, and commitment to ideological perspectives rather than as a set of skills.

This is picked up by numerous writers, and Bhattacharyya (2004) is worthy of specific mention as he draws from definitions over the previous four decades. He discusses numerous different definitions in literature and concludes that vagueness perpetuates across them, combined with a lack of clear methodological grounding. Critical that definitions are flawed in trying to be all-encompassing, and ambiguous, with some even implying that ‘community development is not definable’ (2004:9), Bhattacharyya concludes there is a need for ‘a more rigorous definition’ (2004:5). He points to the need for a theory of community

development, recommending one that ‘advocates a particular kind of social order and a particular methodology for getting there’ (2004:10).

Interestingly, Bhattacharyya (2004) espouses that a theory of community development ought not to include skills-based definitions, tools, and techniques such as asset-based community development (Krezmann & McKnight 1993) and social action, presumably also community capacity building. Notably he is not alone in this (Craig 2011). This is helpful as we begin to see that some of the championed definitions of community development could more readily be situated simply as techniques as opposed to purpose, values and principles. Henderson and Thomas (2013) are illustrative of the skills focus in their championing of the groupwork and networking skills involved in bringing people together in neighbourhoods for community development. Ultimately however, Bhattacharyya (2004) points to fundamental differences between purpose and methods, and tools or techniques, calling for wider awareness of this. This reveals some of the evident bifurcation of practice (Kenny 2016) but accepting his perspective means a definition of community development ought to be grounded in clarity about purpose.

Bhattacharyya’s comment that vague definitions can be unhelpful is evidently important, however broad definitions do not always point to problematic ambiguity, rather the acknowledgement that community development does indeed take on different forms. Setting its limits may inadvertently narrow the field to a profession, missing the wider community development processes people in communities engage in without intervention from a community development worker, as Shahid and Jha (2016) have argued above. This dilemma is a central aspect of differences in definitions and further opens the debate. Taking an occupation perspective, Gilchrist and Taylor (2011:13) suggest that ‘community workers are there to serve the interests of communities, and to help them gain greater influence over decisions that affect their lives’. Similarly, Henderson and Thomas (1987:15) state that

community development is about ‘putting people in touch with one another’. Furthermore, Popple (2015:100) states that community development is a:

> broad approach to working with groups and individuals to help them acquire the skills and confidence to improve the quality of the lives of its members and communities… with an emphasis on self-help by means of education.

To labour the point, here Popple presents another example of a skills-based definition focussing on the actions the community workers undertake, rather than the reasons for doing so. Skills-based definitions are not by definition problematic as all community development clearly requires skilled action, they are however deemed limited by not obviously being grounded in theoretical or ideological perspectives. The danger is that they could be interpreted as falling into a more service-provision approach and the emphasis on self-help, rather than agency, could even unintentionally be grounded in deficit assumptions, flying in the face of the values of mutuality and the social justice intentions. Emejulu (2015) is particularly critical of such deficit perspectives suggesting such community development discourse often falls into patronising attitudes towards people in communities.

Craig *et al* (2011:7) explain that focusing on what community development workers do is not enough, and state:

> Community development now is not only a practice, involving skills, a knowledge base and a strong values base. It is also a goal, self-evidently the development of communities, in the context of social justice agendas… it is perhaps better to see community development as an ‘embodied argument’, a continuing search for new forms of social and political expression.

Evidently, they are framing community development more as having ongoing purpose rather than simply as skills or technique and this has significance. An 'embodied argument' suggests ongoing process with the 'search for new forms of social and political expression' being the democratic intention that allows for mutuality. In this way people in communities can be at the centre of the embodied arguments in mutual process, rather than being framed initially as pathologized deficits in need of service provision before they can participate or have political awareness. This also allows for an edging away from colonial mindsets, another controversial aspect of community development practice (Emejulu 2015; Mayo 2016). It is however an extremely broad definition.

Involved in the 'embodied argument' definition, Popple's (2015) skills-based definition was published after it, which again points to some intrinsic unpredictability in defining community development. In this unsettled context, the moves in recent years by the International Association for Community Development (IACD) to develop a shared global definition are therefore not without controversy. The IACD board agreed a definition of community development in 2016 that they stated was solely for the board's use. However, more recently they have acknowledged, even celebrated, a level of global use of it. This has led to their claim it has become widely accepted because, they suggest, it offers a 'common understanding of what that practice is about' (Ross *et al* 2018:13). This is indeed a confident, perhaps bold, move in a field of contested practice and it has triggered further debate on the nature and meaning of community development. The IACD (2016) definition is:

> Community Development is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, economic opportunity, equality and social justice, through the organisation, education and

> empowerment of people within their communities, whether these be of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings (Ross *et al* 2018:13).

This definition embraces political process with the focus on participative democracy, sustainable development, and rights. Notably, in contrast with the early UN definition of 'economic and social progress', the focus on economic opportunity is an evident acknowledgement of the place of community development in challenging the context of socio-economic inequalities. The focus on equality and social justice is emblematic. However, the use of 'empowering' is interesting with the suggestion being that professionals or academics are engaged in the 'organisation, education and empowerment of people'.

For Craig (2002:3), empowerment is 'the creation of sustainable structures, processes, and mechanisms, over which local communities have an increased degree of control, and from which they have a measurable impact on public and social policies affecting these communities'. This may indeed be the intended focus of IACD, however that is unclear. Toomey (2009:182) considers empowerment as a 'abused term' that is freely associated with community development, suggesting that practitioners ought to use it to scrutinise practice whilst considering the contradictory possibilities that their actions are, in effect, disempowering. The nuances of such a term and its usage are revealing and when it becomes 'empowering people', it has a different problematic essence. Jeffs and Smith (2005:21) explain that:

> we don't change people, people change themselves in interaction with others. To talk of empowering people is thus to risk being anti-liberatory.

They grapple with the notion of power and suggest that the claims of some workers that they work to the 'empowerment of 'clients'' (Jeffs & Smith 1996:15) is patronising and:

> At worst it encourages dependency of the 'empowered' on the 'empowerer' and a view of people as objects to be acted upon'…[Power] is a feature of relationships. It is not something to be gifted.

This perspective has a similar essence to Emejulu's (2011) concerns about community development discourse that belies superior and patronising attitudes to people in communities. That said, there is much use of this notion of 'empowering people' throughout the literature (Sercombe 2010; Butcher 2007) but with equally many challenges to this as a concept (Kenny 2016; Ledwith 2016; Shaw 2011; Emejulu 2011).

According to Butcher (2007:18), 'The raison d'etre of all community practice, is of course, to work for community change by enabling and resourcing community members to address felt community needs'. This notion of 'enabling' points to one of the central dilemmas and it may help to explain some of the confusion. If we suggest that community development is a professional practice that enables and empowers people in communities to work together to create better communities and engage in democratic life, then we are potentially painting a picture of poor unskilled people in communities needing helped by worthy professionals in order to be able to engage, meaning they are in some way deficient and the community development worker is the 'shining knight' or 'saviour'. Emejulu (2015) challenges this notion of community development as undertaken by saviours in practice and this points to some of the discomfort about the recent IACD definition - it can easily lend itself to this picture and to Ledwith's (2007) outcry that people are potentially individualised and pathologised in the name of community development practice. As Kenny (2016) is at pains to explain, people in

communities can and do engage in community development process often with, but also without, a community development worker.

Suggesting ‘community empowerment’ is now generally being used synonymously with improved service provision’ Ledwith (2007a:12) warns of the need to remain vigilant in order to avoid community development being side-lined, or swallowed, into service provision. This, she warns, if allowed to happen, will result in failure to ‘analyse and act on the structures of power which continue unabated to create and recreate oppression and marginalisation’ (Ledwith 2016:290). This gets to the core of the debate - community development definitions that remain skills-based miss the opportunity to highlight the ideological perspectives grounding the action. Accepting this means ‘challenges to hegemony’ ought to be acknowledged in a global definition, also ‘mutuality’ revealing the mutual engaged processes community members are involved in.

Further, the notable lack of reference in the IACD (2016) definition to people’s critical consciousness and politicisation, and to the community development processes they engage in being led by them, is potentially problematic. It consequently leaves the IACD (2016) definition open to criticisms of inadvertent colonial assessment grounded in attitudes of intervention through external expertise. Emejulu (2015; 2011) criticises definitions of community development that assume people in communities lack agency across the board and therefore need interventions to begin to develop agency and come alive. There is a difference between seeing socio-economic inequalities and the skewed impact they have on people in communities in limiting life opportunities and striving to challenge that, and the assumption that people in those circumstances are generally deficit and comprehensively in need of organisation or rescuing by professionals.

Kenny (2018:1) expresses specific concerns that the IACD (2016) definition is seeing community development 'delimited to a professional occupation and an academic discipline'. She argues this relates to the diminishing of community development as a values-led approach. Pointing to the dangers of repeating the errors founded in the colonial history, she argues that the values of community development are contrary to the narrowing process of professionalisation and academy-led understanding espoused by the IACD in this way. The IACD definition is therefore not without controversy particularly because of the missing focus on community development as a process that can (and is) undertaken by people collectively in communities. Toomey's (2009:189) thoughts on community development as catalyst are useful for explaining the 'horizontal learning… as local people share experiences and ideas with peers'. However, Kenny (2018) takes this further emphasising that there are clear impacts people in communities can have politically through community development processes. To omit this from the definition is indeed contentious in a discipline that espouses values of mutuality and equity.

In contrast to the IACD 'global' definition, Meade *et al* (2016:4) use three distinctions when discussing community development, firstly as: 'a process through which ordinary people collectively attempt to influence their life chances'; secondly as practice that is: 'the purposefully applied values, knowledge and skills underpinning the process'; and finally as an: 'occupation'. Describing people in communities as 'ordinary' is not without contention and again demonstrates some of the ongoing challenges and contradictions in a values-led discipline. Notwithstanding, they notably frame community development as process, practice, and occupation but not as an academic discipline which is an evident new addition in the IACD definition. Similarly, Kenny (2016:47) draws from the work of numerous writers, including Craig, Mayo, Gilchrist & Taylor and Ife, and concludes that, broadly speaking, community development:

> …can be understood as a way of empowering people in disadvantaged communities to act together for the purpose of influencing and exerting greater control over decisions that affect their lives.

She goes on to state that although this may appear straightforward practice differs whether interpreted as 'process…an activist endeavour or as professional practice'. Notably she uses the term 'empowering people' and concurs with Meade *et al* (2016) by not including academia in this. Banks, however, does include academic discipline as she develops this further and she concludes that there are essentially five different categories for community development, as follows:

> process…practice…occupation…academic discipline…social movement (2019:7).

This helps put some of the variations in definitions into context because some writers choose to focus their definition on one or more of these categories, but rarely all of them. That said, the broader more open definitions can cut across all, by interpretation. Interpretation is however one of the key characteristics here because many of the nuances are down to interpretations of meanings, categories, and ideological perspectives.

Bhattacharyya's proposed theory is to define community development as 'the fostering of social relations that are characterized by solidarity and agency' (2004:14) and by doing this the suggestion is that it is given its rightful intellectual position. It also potentially gives it its rightful position as process as well as practice, occupation, academic discipline, and social movement. It also sits alongside community development as embodied argument. Nonetheless, this remains wide open as a definition and again emphasises the need for wider contextualisation that many writers provide.

Conceptual influences on definitions

As well as the categories, some of the differences are explained by focussing on ideological underpinnings and conceptual understandings. Gilchrist (2019:36) builds on Martin's (1987) work and usefully explains three models of community development as: consensus with a conservative or communitarian political framework; pluralist with a liberal or social-democratic leaning; or conflict with a radical or socialist grounding. Gilchrist further elaborates that 'social planning, self-help [and] volunteering' typify the former, Community engagement, Partnership working, Lobbying [and] Community capacity building' the subsequent, and 'Community organising, Campaigning and Advocacy', the latter. She also relates certain skills and techniques to different conceptual analyses. This is a useful framing, not as a definitive demarcation but because it leads to the awareness that foregrounding ideological underpinnings has a place in aiding understandings of what community development is and how it is being defined. Furthermore, the likelihood is that aspects of each will construct practice and the demarcations are not so clear cut.

Henderson & Vercseg (2010:15) agree that contestations reveal more than just differences in definitions and meanings and that they also involve 'disagreements that are political and ideological'. In this sense Ledwith (2001; 2011; 2016) specifically defines her perspective on community development as radical and influenced by feminism, Freire (1996) and Gramsci (1986) and this provides a level of clarity throughout her work as she espouses action with social justice intent. Similarly grounded in political process and social justice intention, Dominelli (2006) clearly espouses feminist perspectives on community development. Likewise, Emejulu (2011) foregrounds intersectional feminist perspectives and action for socio-political change. Shaw and Mayo (2016) develop a class analysis influenced by Marxism and focussing on social inequalities. It is less common to see community development defined as conservative practice, as Gilchrist (2019) addresses above. That

said, self-help and volunteering are included as part of actions detailed in the name of community development.

This is of import to the community development debates. Kenny (2016) suggests that different conceptual frameworks will define community development aims in different ways and therefore the very purpose of community development practice becomes different. She suggests that community development workers will focus on practices such as capacity building and advocacy if the aims are to make small ongoing changes whereas a conceptual framework that has structural change at its heart will result in practice and process with people in communities to mobilize and challenge power structures. Other kinds of practice, such participatory service provision focus on amelioration and therefore work to support people in communities to deal with the status quo. There are clear ideological differences here and this is helpful as Kenny describes the continuum that is at the centre of community development discourse. That said, she goes on to acknowledge that there are overlaps and that 'roles which at face value seem to ameliorate can develop into far-reaching resistance to government policy' (2016:57).

Ledwith (2020; 2016; 2011) is critical of the ameliorative approaches Kenny refers to for espousing values pertaining to social justice whilst inadvertently limiting people's opportunities. There is a strong thread apparent throughout contemporary UK writers on community development that concur with this perspective and espouse community development practice should be more obviously grounded in political process rather than service provision (Shaw 2004; Emejulu 2011; Craig 2002). This is illustrated by Meade *et al* (2016) who call for a:

> …measure of consensus regarding the necessary reassertion of a democratic, politically robust and inclusive version of community development; one which is critically engaged and posits alternatives to the current hegemony by drawing on its distinctive connections to and relevance for people's everyday lives in communities.

At once acknowledging that versions of community development exist, they also go on to suggest that their hope for an agreed definition along the lines of this is neither simple nor foreseeable. This is significant and implies that such politically active process is potentially not seen often enough. In a world of definitions that vary between, and in, different countries (Newman & Clarke 2016) and in which some do include more conservative definitions (such as 'imposed community development [and] directed forms of community development' (Matarrita-Cascante & Brennan 2011: 297-8)) anathema to the political, community-led, mutuality many espouse, the potential for consensus is somewhat far off.

Notwithstanding, ongoing efforts are evident and IACD's attempts may not find consensus, but they are grounded in a striving for that. Furthermore, there is indeed evidence of such attempts in different ways over recent years with the European Community Development Network (EuCDN) producing a common framework in 2014. Scottish perspectives are represented in these global attempts with The Scottish Community Development Centre, a network body, heavily involved in the latter (EuCDN 2014) and the Community Learning & Development Standards Council Scotland (professional body for community work) in the IACD process (Ross *et al* 2018). In addition, such attempts at consensus are not new and Craig *et al* (2011:9-10) highlight the earlier actions by IACD with the Budapest Declaration of 2004, describing it as a 'significant' agreement by representatives from over thirty countries 'mostly across Europe but also from Asia, Africa and North America'. The Budapest Declaration states:

> Community development is a way of strengthening civil society by prioritising the actions of communities, and their perspectives in the development of social, economic, and environmental policy. It seeks the empowerment of local communities, taken to mean both geographical communities, communities of interest or identity and communities organising around specific themes or policy initiatives. It strengthens the capacity of people as active citizens through their community groups, organisations and networks; and the capacity of institutions and agencies (public, private and non-governmental) to work in dialogue with citizens to shape and determine change in their communities. It plays a crucial role in supporting active democratic life by promoting the autonomous voice of disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. It has a set of core values/social principles covering human rights, social inclusion, equality, and respect for diversity; and a specific skills and knowledge base (IACD 2004).

This definition has been usurped by the more recent IACD one cited above, but it is worthy of note because the changes have triggered significant debates. Kenny (2016) suggests moving from this to the 2016 definition is a backwards step. Sighting the values as central to practice, this definition highlights community-led policy making, dialogical approaches to shaping positive social changes in communities, and raising the influence of people in marginalised communities throughout democratic process. Here community development is not presented as a profession or academic discipline, there is no sense of this being something that people do unto others, and it allows for an embracing of community development as dialogical, political process grounded in human rights.

Influenced by Illich (2000), Kenny points to professionalism as something that ‘bestows the moral authority to advise, instruct and direct’ (2018:2) and she suggests that this can have a

disabling effect on communities because the professional is deemed to know best and is come to be relied on for that. Kenny is pointing to the concepts at the core of community development that are fundamentally founded in the need to readdress power dynamics particularly staying grounded in the belief that people in communities have expertise and that a community development practitioner does not have superior status or knowledge. With collaboration a central premise, she suggests there is a danger community development loses sight of the ideological perspectives that effective community development practitioners ultimately ought to make their own roles redundant in the empowerment of people and communities' process. Kenny's concerns about the move from this to the IACD 2016 definition above that purports community development as a profession and academic discipline therefore have weight. They are however not new as Mayo (1998:164) emphasised the existing concerns of 'professionalisation having been posed as potentially undermining to activism and autonomous community movements' in the 1990s.

The emphasis on professionalisation is evident in Scottish policy and practice with the recent IACD definition, and international standards, heavily supported by the Community Learning & Development Standards Council Scotland (Ross *et al* 2018). The relatively recent moves in Scotland to define Community Learning & Development as embracing Adult Learning, Youth Work and Capacity Building (Scottish Executive 2004), is also interesting for its lack of focus on community development and the favouring of the more skills-based capacity building that is ideologically grounded in a deficit model. A watered-down version, or a deficit approach to intervening in communities that helps people to become more able to develop, so they can skilfully engage in society, capacity building is interesting in its need for, and legitimisation of, professional interventions (Craig 2016). On the other hand, Shaw (2007:26) warns of false dichotomies between community development as professional or technical and community development as social change or radical, suggesting it is both a 'professional practice and a political practice'. This is important and points to the fact that people are

employed as paid community development workers to work alongside people in communities and community members engage in community development action with or without them. It is both, and the ideological underpinnings are the important factor.

Bhattacharyya (2004) highlights that different kinds of action are fuelled by different interpretations and this leads to considering the place of conceptual framing in community development. Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan (2011:293) state that community development is both nebulous and 'defined by many conceptual and practical characterizations'. Gilchrist and Taylor (2011:13) consequently acknowledge that for a community development worker, 'their work will inevitably be influenced by their own interests, capabilities, preferences and 'theories of change''. Toomey (2009:183) states 'practitioners are people, not models, and therefore their own personal actions are full of the tensions between doing what they have been sent to do and what they feel is right, which are often not the same'. The many definitions of community development, and there are more than cited here, are evidently open to interpretation.

The ongoing grappling with finding definitions for community development do create healthy opportunities for debates and reflection that are necessary in a values-based practice. In this sense it is not a bad thing, indeed Gilchrist and Taylor (2011:6) connect the 'versatility and value' of community development together, positively. However, there is also much written about community development as contested practice and when definitions result in practice that potentially inadvertently reinforces inequalities that does become problematic. Newman & Clarke (2016:31) frame community development as political practice and suggest that because of its political nature, it is both vulnerable to government influence and control and open to activists' influencing 'radical political and social change'. The dual nature that can result in very different interpretations further explains some of the varying definitions, and resulting contested practice, further discussed in the next section.

Contested practice

> …tensions and contradictory understanding represent one of the dominant and continuing themes in the history of community development within the UK (Craig, Mayo, Popple, Shaw and Taylor 2011:9).

Much as community development assumes different definitions in literature, the differences are not always simple and therefore it is often described as contested practice (Emejulu 2015; Craig *et al* 2011; Shaw 2004). Meade, Shaw and Banks (2016:5) contend that 'both in theory and practice, it is contested and malleable'. Craig *et al* (2011:7) state that community development 'has always had an ambiguous nature' and Meade *et al* (2015:4) further suggest the 'plurality of meanings and usages has the potential to generate considerable confusion and contestation'. Robson & Spense (2011:288) concur that this is not a new phenomenon and that 'it is well established that community development is a contested activity'.

In this sense contested practice means that there are ongoing differences and debates about its nature and intentions, as alluded to above. This is not by definition problematic, as it allows for the dynamic breadth of actions particularly to acknowledge the work of people in communities, as well as paid workers, in transformative practice. However, the apparent contradictions and varying definitions not only result in community development being open to interpretations but also significantly to criticisms of it as vague practice. In addition, Henderson & Vercseg (2010:29) suggest it is vulnerable to accusations of pretentions and overclaiming of potential and impact. Jha (2016:65) further elucidates this and points to a

‘tumultuous’ journey for community development along a ‘path defined by radical potentialities yet able to claim only limited success’.

The contestations go deeper. Toomey (2009:182) states ‘there is little general agreement on what actions fall within the definitions of community development’ and suggests what she calls the ‘growing pains’ of a developing discipline are felt both by practitioners and community members. Presumably they are also felt by academics and policymakers alike. This is indeed potentially problematic, and Toomey highlights the need for practitioners to fully understand their roles to avoid inadvertently impacting negatively on people in communities. This is important and leads to one of the key contestations about community development in the literature, namely that definitions claiming positive social change often belie limited approaches.

Indeed, Shaw (2011) suggests that the rhetoric of transformation and empowerment often conceals conformist and conservative practice. She is not alone in this thinking and Emejulu (2015), Ledwith (2020), and Craig *et al* (2011) share some of her concerns. Critical of what are defined as the more ameliorative approaches, Ledwith is direct with her call for genuine, thoughtful action that avoids these potentially dangerous contradictions:

> in failing to be vigilant about changes in the political context we run the risk of developing practice that reinforces discrimination whilst still waving the banner of social justice (2007:1).

She points to the need for politically aware, critical practice that is thoughtful, considered and grounded in theoretical understandings. Craig (2007, 1998) concurs, criticising practice for confused or missing ideological groundings. This highlights that the values of mutuality,

environmental and social justice, rights, democracy and equality (Ross *et al* 2018; Meade, Shaw & Banks 2016, Ledwith 2011), although strong and clear, are not always translated into practice that could be defined as transformative. The inference is that community development workers fall into helping communities deal better with imposed changes rather than working to create dynamic, positive social change, producing in effect conservative, ameliorative practice rather than transformative practice. Granted this dichotomy may be over-simplistic with the reality sitting somewhere in between, but the prevalence in the literature highlighting these limitations is significant.

It is further apparent throughout the literature that community development practice as contested space is not a new phenomenon. In the 1990s, writers such as Meekosha (1993) and Cooke and Shaw (1996) were highlighting a lack of agreement or continuity in community development practice aims and processes. Miller & Ahmed (1997) also highlighted community development as contested and at a crossroads. In 1996, Cooke claimed fragmented practice was commonplace and marginalizing, even endangering, the potential for community work to engage with positive social action. Further, Mayo (1975) highlights the colonial history of community development with the misdirected grounding in 'civilising while exploiting'. Some of the differences in definitions are indeed noted to come from the British colonial history and the use of community development as education of the 'masses', grounded in political and social control (Taylor 2007; Mayo 1975, 2011). Kenny (2016:49) further elucidates acknowledging the colonial history as bi-fold with 'genuine efforts to support self-determination of post-colonial societies' alongside 'strategic endeavours to maintain Western power'.

These same dilemmas are present in contemporary writings with community development practice considered to be similarly fractured now as it was then and notably that is also evident as part of global perspectives (Kenny 2018; Bhattacharyya 2004; Chen 2016).

Kenny (2018) goes on to warn of the need to be ever vigilant about the colonial historical foundations of community development practice, as does Emejulu (2015) and Shaw (2008) suggesting that we can still see influences of that in practice today.

Shaw's (2011:302) naming of the split historical roots of community development as having a foot both in 'autonomous working-class struggles' and in 'benevolent welfare paternalism' and resulting in 'curiously hybrid practice' goes some way to explaining the ambiguities apparent in contemporary practice. The question of whether practice attempts to address wider societal inequalities and is embedded in the drive for emancipatory change, or whether it works with the immediate and local with a paternalistic focus on the symptoms of structural inequalities (placatory practice or maintenance of the status quo), remains a central ongoing consideration in community development discourse. However more than that, the contestations also refer to practice that claims the former while situating more readily in the latter. This relates to Henderson and Vercseg's (2010) comments on overclaiming, but also points to charges of blinkered or 'unthinking' practice (Ledwith 2020; Craig 2011).

Some of these more conservative influences on community development can be traced back to the policy-led impacts on practice that favour and demand efficiency and service-led outcomes over democratic voice. Kenny (2016:54) points to the influence of market demands pushing community development practice into funding-led managerialism, with communities the 'often unwitting objects of state policy'. Meade *et al* (2016:11) articulate this well when they state that:

> policymakers and governments have often struggled to move beyond a control or disciplinary style of engagement to a more democratic one.

Once again, this highlights challenges to the very nature and intentions of community development values. Craig's (2011:282) perspective takes this further as he points to community development, along with community capacity building, as 'arenas for political contestations' because they are 'manipulated by governments to give a false sense of community ownership and control'. Shaw & Crowther (2013:390) concur and point to practice being 'increasingly beleaguered by managerialist imperatives and in which democratic engagement has become increasingly compromised'. This is highlighted in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 (Scottish Government 2015) that has both created opportunities for community ownership of assets whilst simultaneously burdened communities with crumbling community centres.

Fraser (2020) points to the core agenda being austerity-led rather than community empowerment. Similarly, Tabner (2018:1) suggests it 'rebrands austerity as empowerment', fails to take account of the complexities of empowerment and favours a naïve vision of 'skilled, resilient, committed individuals' in communities with time and the will to manage assets. This, she continues favours well-resourced communities and further disadvantages those already marginalised and calls for 'a more nuanced approach' (2018:11). In such a context those engaged in community development are faced with direct challenges to the values' base and as Bauman (2001:125) usefully highlights:

> To stand up against the status quo always takes courage considering the awesome forces gathered behind it.

Under such pressures it is not surprising that community development practice varies and is contested, nor perhaps that it results in dichotomous descriptions of radical versus ameliorative or 'reactionary' versus 'revolutionary' practice (Ledwith 2016:9). However, this is

not the full picture and part of the context for community development as contested practice is that it is made up of concepts that are also contested, one significantly being community and some discussion of that here is therefore required.

Community

Whilst writers often define community development, they also spend time discussing what constitutes community. Notably, Buchroth and Parkin (2010) emphasise twelve different suggested ways of defining community. Craig (2007) acknowledges Hillery's (1964) review of literature that cites hundreds of definitions of community with the only common denominator being people's interactions. Gilchrist & Taylor (2011) also cite Hillery's work on numerous definitions.

It is therefore not surprising that Meade *et al* (2016:1) acknowledge that 'The concept of community is itself nebulous and difficult to trace' and that Ife (2016:100) comments that defining community is 'highly problematic and contested'. Shaw (2008:24) concurs, highlighting representations of community as 'an historically situated and theoretically contested idea'. Titterton & Smart (2008:55) simply suggest ''Community' as a concept itself needs to be treated with care'. Finally, Somerville (2011:1) suggests 'its meaning is complex, multidimensional and essentially contested'. Community becomes defined as theory, method, place, identity, ideology, policy and practice (Blackshaw 2010), all with relevance to community development. It further becomes defined as an ideal, contrived, and as a political construct:

> community has virtually become a political category, in itself a means of distinguishing the 'deserving' from the 'undeserving' in policy and practice; acting as an alibi for the hollowed out decentralized state (Shaw 2007:34).

Plant (2011, 1974) is much cited in community development literature (Meade *et al* 2016; Gilchrist & Taylor 2011; Shaw 2008), for noting the moving nature of community and highlighting how its various uses commonly define its meanings, thus pointing to its contested nature. Drawing from that notion, Ife (2016:100) postulates that the incessant creation, and recreation, of community as a construction is an integral 'part of the process of community development'. Alongside Plant, Bauman's (2001) work on community is also much cited in community development literature (Kenny 2016; Buchroth & Parkin 2010; Blackshaw 2010). He points to community as a term that has overwhelmingly positive connotations conjuring up good feelings and a hoped-for, if elusive, way of living. Building from Williams' (1976) work on community as 'once was', Bauman (2001:3) frames community as a:

> … paradise lost – but one to which we dearly hope to return, and so we feverishly see the roads that may bring us there.

The role of community development in striving to recreate elements of this hoped for way of engaging is well documented (Gilchrist 2019; Ife 2016; Popple 2015).

Blackshaw (2010:5) cites Bell and Newby's (1971) work, describing it as a classic that traced meanings of community to sociological 'founding fathers'. Alongside this, Tonnies' (1955) constructions of community as Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft play an integral part in discussions of community in the community development literature. Gilchrist (2019:3) uses the former to illustrate community as 'mutual understanding, shared experiences and

solidarity' and the latter as wider society. Popple (2015:12) interprets Gemeinschaft as social relationship based on 'affection, kinship, or membership of a community, such as family or…friends' and Gesellschaft as the 'division of labour and contractual relationships between isolated individuals'. Acknowledging they are constructs, Popple goes on to usefully explain that contemporary society situates more readily in the individualistic definition and this can be useful in explaining modern day community development challenges. Notions of a breakdown of community and individualised perspectives present challenges to community development process that is founded on a definition of community that is situated in the existence, or creation, of the characteristics of the hoped-for way of living. Conversely, they equally increasingly legitimise its need.

Craig *et al* (2011) suggest that the struggles to define community are crucial in explaining the contestations around community development practice. Shaw (2008:36) draws on Plant's work and suggests that community as the 'good life' often covers up the realities of socio-economic inequalities. It can also be used across the political spectrum equally as a site of dissent or of a site of control for the preserving of the status quo. This dilemma is highlighted across the literature and Gilchrist (2019:3) picks up on the concept of community both as 'agent as well as object for intervention devised to remedy perceived deficits and alleviate deprivation'. She further suggests that community can be used problematically as 'them and us' and points to government-led interventions founded on deficit models aimed at people living in poverty. Craig (2016:42) concurs and suggests that the concept of community is often exploited to 'protect the interests of government'. The contestations around what community might be and how it is defined are equalized by how it is engaged with and to what end and this is important for community development.

Community development has a history of conflating community with place and this is traced back to its colonial history as well as to government interventions in so-called areas of

deprivation (Shaw 2011; Mayo 1977). Bhattacharyya (2004) suggests that community development has suffered because of this exclusive fusion. He calls for a broad definition of community that embraces place as well as 'interest' or the 'widest range of communities' (2004:12).

This remains a focus of challenge for some in the literature (Emejulu 2011), however there is noticeably a welcome tendency in contemporary community development writings both to acknowledge the complexities and define community beyond place. Pointing to awakenings in the 1960s about the limitations of community as geography and particularly the inherent flawed assumptions of homogeneity, Craig *et al* (2011:8) acknowledge communities of place embrace 'a wide range of communities of identity' with differing needs and interests. Furthermore, narrow definitions of community have long been challenged by feminist community development (Dominelli 1995; Wilson 1977) and black community development (Emejulu 2011; hooks 2001; Lorde 1984) with levels of success, at least in definitions. Consequently, it is common in contemporary writings to cover three broad definitions of community as place, identity and shared interests (Banks 2019; Mayo 2017; Popple 2015; Craig *et al* 2011).

Nonetheless, Meekosha, Wannan & Shuttleworth (2016:146) are critical that in practice communities are still treated as homogeneous and that 'little attention is given to the diverse needs of those who live there: Aboriginal families, disabled people and older people'. There are important considerations for community development inherent to this. The contestations about community therefore remain live and feed contestations in community development discourse and practice.

Gilchrist (2019:46) points to a longstanding idea that the ‘essence of community’ is in relationships rather than place. Westoby (2019:209) provides a further level of response to this as he usefully points to community as ‘an ethical space’ and suggests that:

> Reimagining community as a symbolic site for dialogue and deliberation foregrounds the democratic impulse of community development – people need to be in conversation with one another discussing, and creating their vision together, and then respecting difference.

Wilkinson & Pickett (2010) highlight the role of building community as a central premise in challenging for positive change. Notably their more recent research (2018) further highlights social bonds, mutuality, respect and building community as central to good health. However, Bryson and Mowbray (2005, 1998) warn of neoliberal-led policy that uses the language of community ubiquitously but as an ironic ‘spray on solution’ for social issues that are often resulting from government decisions and underfunding. Similarly, Newman & Clarke (2016:32) point to community as an object of ‘political and government desire’. The tendency remains for the different parties to see community as a positive concept. Despite being contested and nebulous and open to broad usage and interpretation, it remains often portrayed throughout the community development literature, along the lines of Williams’ classic perspective, as:

> …the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships…unlike all other terms of social organisation (*state, nation, society etc*) it never seems to be used unfavourably (Williams 1976:76).

Community remains a sought-after state and community development as practice and process that strives for this ideal. However as Shaw (2007:28) warns, such overly romanticised versions of community can 'all too easily obscure the social reality of communities', ignore the context of social inequalities, and be used to 're-present persistent structural problems as local problems susceptible to local or individual solutions'. This context presents a further challenge to community development and is critiqued in the next section.

The context of community development

Community development starts from a recognition of social injustice, that the world is an unequal place and that this is problematic, by definition, for all (Ledwith 2020; Westoby & Dowling 2013; Craig 2007). Kenny (2016:48) points to the core of community development as 'recognising the agency and political legitimacy of disadvantaged and marginalised communities'. Shaw and Mayo (2016:3) point to the role for community development in impacting on the 'evils of inequality'. Similarly, Gilchrist and Taylor (2016) highlight the role in tackling inequalities. Indeed, community development being concerned with social inequalities is commonplace across the literature.

Popple (2019:53) suggests the role of community development is increasingly urgent in the context of 'individualism, the pursuit of instant gratification, the frequent disregard for moral standards, and the acceptance of massive inequalities' and she relates this to neoliberalism. Indeed, the impact of neoliberalism is a specific and recurring concern throughout the writing on community development practice (Ledwith 2020; McGregor 2020; Mayo 2017; Meade *et al* 2016; Kenny 2016; Minnete & Fox Piven 2016) with it commonly framed as the context defining the need for social change. In Harvey's (2007) class-based framing of neoliberalism

as a deliberate political project that clawed power back from workers and uses free markets to concentrate power and wealth in a small elitist group of society, neoliberalism is presented as a context that breeds inequalities. Furthermore, Brown's (2006:16) thoughts on the resultant individualisation of social problems has significance:

> As neoliberalism converts every political or social problem into market terms, it converts them to individual problems with market solutions.

Consequently, Meekosha *et al* (2016:144) argue that community development action needs to be premised on the 'redistribution of wealth and resources' and genuinely grounded in collective community action, otherwise it will do nothing to impact positively on the ravages of neoliberalism.

Alcock and Craig (2001) point to significant changes to welfare provision as a result of neoliberal ideologies influencing successive governments. Writing almost twenty years ago, they suggest that the changes are 'unlikely to be reversed in the foreseeable future' (2001:136). As we see rising inequalities and neoliberal-led paired back welfare provision prevailing and perpetuating inequalities (Marmot 2020; Alston 2019; Dorling 2013), their thoughts remain pertinent today. Alston (2019) concurs and presents a compelling argument that the United Kingdom's decade of austerity measures was unnecessary and completely avoidable. Agreeing that this context is not inevitable, Ridge & Wright (2008) point to successive UK governments choosing policies and actions that result in a widening of the gap between poverty and wealth. Highlighting the global impact, Wilkinson & Pickett (2018; 2010) argue that countries with wider inequalities in wealth gaps result in greater social problems, and what they refer to as social pain; they also espouse it is entirely avoidable. In

this context, Tyler (2013:7) explains that neoliberalism impacts on political parties both on the left and the right has weakened political opposition and:

> …curtailed democratic freedoms, fractured communities, decomposed the fabric of social life and (re)constituted nineteenth-century levels of economic inequalities…

Moreover, Giroux (2012:57) talks of a resultant crisis in public values stating that neoliberalism is 'almost pathological in its disdain for community, public values and the public good'. His thoughts on the resulting drive towards 'individualised solutions to socially produced problems' (Giroux 2012:59) are of central relevance to the intentions of community development, cited as a pressure that often results in individualised responses under the guise of community development. Similarly, Bauman (2001:55) points to a 'weakening of democratic pressures, a growing inability to act politically, a massive exit from politics and from responsible citizenship'. Notably, Giroux (2012:73) argues that market driven economies do not necessarily have to result in social inequalities, and he calls for a move away from survival of the fittest approaches or what he calls 'economic Darwinism'.

As Harvey (2007) intends, Shaw and Mayo (2016:3) argue that the neoliberal context presupposes a class analysis for community development as the 'super-wealthy become even wealthier and the poor become even poorer'. Drawing from a Marxist analysis, they suggest this draws attention to the 'underlying *causes* of social inequalities… [and] has particularly relevance for those concerned to reverse the dynamics of inequality' (2016:7) (their emphasis). Pointing to further complexities and taking care to expand their analysis, they draw from Bourdieu (1985) acknowledging symbolic violence and cultural limitations imposed on communities. Moreover, as is becoming more apparent in community development literature (Ledwith 2020; Pyles 2019; Emejulu 2016), they recognise the

importance of intersectional analyses and highlight the interconnections of class, gender, race, and sexuality in social inequalities (Crenshaw 2017).

Tyler (2013:8) develops social class analysis further, suggesting there are 'conditions of disenfranchisement on the ground' and that 'stigmatization operates as a form of governance which legitimizes the reproduction and entrenchment of inequalities and injustices'. She suggests neoliberalism has heightened class conflicts and she grounds her thinking in intersectional analysis, notably highlighting that:

> several different categories and groups of people [are] 'laid to waste' by neoliberal economic, political and social policies (including asylum seekers and other unwanted irregular migrants, politically and economically disenfranchised young people, Gypsies and Travellers, people with disabilities).

Tyler (2013:3) opens this further as she suggests that the 'abject forms of inequality and injustice' that come about through neoliberalism can also give rise to 'resistance and revolt'. She points to the social abjection of certain groups at once suggesting they are stigmatised and marginalised as 'revolting' whilst simultaneously suggesting they in turn revolt against their subjectification. This perspective influences much of the writing on community development, particularly Ledwith's work (2020; 2016) and presents a complex context of inequalities and injustice that are not deemed inevitable and that at once both necessitate, and give rise to, actions with transformative social justice intent.

Chen (2016:85) suggests neoliberalism is a double-edged sword because it unfairly throws responsibility at people in communities to deal with the impact of broader social problems that ironically come about from the very neoliberal-led policies that pull back welfare

provision. This is important for community development practice. Agreeing with Tyler (2013) and Ledwith (2007) that this process results in communities being blamed and community members pathologised, Chen also points to the real possibilities for community development process as catalyst for people becoming politicised and engaged in collective action for positive change. Unsurprisingly, it is acknowledged in the literature that this is not a simple ask.

Kenny (2016:55) also highlights the socio-political context that community development operates in and she states that it inevitably 'involves struggles against overwhelming forces'. In the context of neoliberal-led outcome driven policy and funding packages, she recognises why community development practice can fall into limited individualized approaches, for quick wins, and rescuing or ameliorative practice rather than social transformation. She is however critical of this.

Ledwith (2016:1) highlights that the impacts of neoliberalism mean community development practitioners are operating in a political culture where the 'common good has given way to justification for greed' and that understanding it and working with resistance to that is crucial. In this context, she promotes community development as a process that can work to hold onto hope and to create contrasting cultures where communities become connected and there is compassion and collaboration towards the common good:

> Community Development is rooted in a vision of a more fair and just world…We believe that it is possible to create a world in which everyone and everything is encouraged to flourish, a democracy based on participation and collective well-being (Ledwith 2016:5).

Notwithstanding, practice for transformation is evidently not simple, indeed Gilchrist and Taylor (2011:14) suggest community development workers 'tend to be located in areas where the whole community is stigmatised and excluded'. Whilst there are limitations to such a homogeneous perspective on community as geographical, they point to communities suffering 'social breakdown or enduring failures of the local economy' with 'further inequalities and tensions caused by different forms of oppression'. Westoby and Dowling (2013:97) highlight the barriers to engagement people experiencing inequalities face and drawing from Bourdieu's (1999) concept of 'social distress' and Brown's (1995) of 'social injury', they point to the complexities of 'painful material inequality [manifesting] suffering in many destructive ways'. Tyler (2013) points to the resultant social abjection and Mayo (2013:1) laments that 'blaming the victim is a tactic with a long and dishonourable history', suggesting that the Welfare State was originally designed to challenge such attitudes in the pursuit of universal rights.

Community development operating in this context is firmly rooted in the perspective that people in communities have not created the social inequalities they experience and whilst having a central role in influencing change, they therefore cannot be pathologized and made responsible for changes. Rather, wider action is needed in and beyond communities towards structural change and improved policy development. Ledwith's (2011:40) model of critical praxis 'works by locating internal and external forces in community' and this, she suggests, allows for a critical understanding of how these influences 'impact on local lives'. She argues that the community development practitioner needs to have political awareness, awareness of hegemonic forces and the impacts of policy, awareness of the personal as political and a commitment to positive transformative social intent. Fundamentally, if community development action is to challenge the root causes of oppression and marginalisation, she stresses the need for community development processes to be active both within and out with the community of focus. This reveals that the early definitions of community

development focussing on people leading change in communities towards their better socialisation are no longer deemed relevant (Craig 2016; Barr 2014).

Operating in this wider context therefore requires the ability to be astute to power dynamics at play. Gilchrist (2019:35) points to power as a central concept and states 'the role is fundamentally about working with people in communities so that they have more influence over decisions that affect them, whether this is about their own lives or what happens in the world around them'. Ledwith (2011:285) explains this further espousing that 'unless we have an analysis of power, of the structures of oppression in the world that reach into our communities and impact on personal lives, our practice is likely to be tokenistic at best'.

Gramsci's thinking (1986) is useful here and is influential in community development literature, particularly the concept of hegemony and the notion of society being organised in a skewed way to benefit the wealthy and powerful. Building on the notion of practice as contested, Fusova (2016) takes Gramsci's (1975) concept of hegemony and points to its moving context, making it as pertinent today as at any time. Taking hegemony as the notion that the dominant discourse in society reigns and influences politics, economics, policy and practice in the interests of the powerful, Fusova (2016) usefully frames community development as practice that can be either pro-hegemonic (that feeds the dominant discourse), or counter-hegemonic in that it does not lose sight of the personal as political and the need for dissenting voice. Shaw (2007:27) concludes that if the role of community development is 'to enhance agency' then that necessitates an understanding of power and how it 'mediates and controls', and similarly, that action will either liberate or domesticate (Freire 1972). In this context, action to adapt to existing power dynamics and focus on social inclusion sits against action to reveal, challenge, and transform the power dynamics that Shaw (*ibid*) suggests 'systematically marginalise and exclude'. In this context community development can act to reinforce the status quo or to transform.

It can be easy to look at definitions, values and aims of community development and conclude that it ought to sit as a counter-hegemonic practice. If we accept that the power of hegemonic forces perpetuates inequalities in society, then community development with its aims of democratic potential and positive social change ought to engage in challenging the very structures that uphold hegemonic influences. This is acknowledged at once as a role for community development but also as a limitation with some interpretations acting for social inclusion and adapting to fit in, rather than social change and for challenging inequalities.

The context for community development is therefore portrayed as one of enduring inequalities. The challenge for community development is at once to comprehend that in all its complexities in order to engage in practice that avoids blaming the individual and pathologizing communities in favour of action in pursuit of social change in and beyond communities. This means seeing the personal as political, collective action as a necessity and 'being critical' as the basis of change for social justice.

Transformative

Interestingly, whilst acknowledging its contested nature and split roots as sitting at the interface of what Ledwith (2016:9) describes as *'reactionary practice and revolutionary practice'* (her emphasis), community development is commonly described as being grounded in striving for positive social change. An analysis of its transformative charge evidently takes a central place throughout the literature (Ledwith 2020; Pyles 2019; Shaw & Mayo 2016; Taylor & Wilson 2016; Westoby & Dowling 2013; Craig 2011; Emejulu 2011; Shaw 2004) and there is much emphasis on expectations for community development as a catalyst for transformation. This is as opposed to the more reactionary approaches. There are indeed numerous challenges proffered to those involved in reactionary practice to reflect,

critique, ground their practice in theoretical and political analysis and work to expand it to the more transformative approaches (Ledwith 2020; Meade *et al* 2016; Emejulu 2015).

Essentially, community development that is 'reacting to symptoms of oppression' is criticised as lacking and for siding with dominant discourse, thus reinforcing oppression (Ledwith 2016:9). Conversely, practice that challenges '[structural discrimination] that embeds inequalities in the fabric of society' is hailed as the required but often elusive approach (*ibid*). These are Ledwith's words, however there is much concurrence with this perspective across contemporary literature (Banks 2019; Kenny 2018; Craig 2016; Emejulu 2011). This is about striving for positive social change, indeed social transformation rather than individual development (although individual benefits of community development engagement are recognised). The wider context of social inequalities that envelop communities, whether of place or interest, are understood as the driver for transformation:

> '[Community development has] a transformative agenda, an intention to bring about social change that is based on a fair, just and sustainable world. In this respect, it locates the roots of inequality in the structures and processes of society, not in personal or community pathology. This has implications for practice.' (Ledwith 2011:14).

In order to strive for this, there is an expectation that critical thinking and critical action are at the core of community development practice. This means being committed to considered action in pursuit of social, and environmental, justice by working to understand and challenge oppression and structural inequalities (Ledwith 2020; Shaw 2008; Butcher 2007). Bhattacharyya (2004:13) names it as a process that aims to promote agency by: 'generating critical consciousness, addressing problems that the affected people 'own' and define, and

take active measures to solve'. This is the transformation community development strives for and it is a community and societal charge. Influenced by Freire, Bhattacharyya (2004:13) states developing critical consciousness means:

> …not accepting an undesirable condition as fate or unchangeable, understanding the structure of causes that brought it about, and then evolving strategies to mitigate them.

Ledwith (2007:608) concludes this is about having 'transformative social justice intention' whatever the setting. In fact, she consistently frames community development as being grounded in transformative potential (2020, 2016, 2011, 2007) and she is not alone (Adhikari & Taylor 2016; Beck & Purcell 2010). Also influenced by Freire (1972), Ledwith cites him as the biggest theoretical influence on community development practice, embracing his philosophy of conscientisation and learning to question commonly held everyday realities as central to social change. Drawing from Shor's (1992:122) concept of 'extraordinarily re-experiencing the ordinary', Ledwith (2016) suggests the essence of community development as transformative is situated in seeing, and challenging, commonly held assumptions that contrive to perpetuate structural inequalities. She defines a socially just society as being grounded in 'equality and mutual responsibility…that values human rights and recognises the dignity of everyone'. This demand for a commitment to fairness and justice in terms of working towards transformation means the call to embrace values that strive for social justice is a strong feature across the literature.

Gilchrist and Taylor (2011:13) suggest community development is a 'long-term values-based process' that aims to:

> promote social justice… [which is] understood as the development of a more equal society, with wealth, opportunities and power more evenly distributed across the population.

Banks (2019:11) also highlights promoting *'social justice, equality and equity'* (her emphasis) as core values and she defines these as:

> …working for a fair distribution of material and social goods in society according to people's needs, acknowledging harmful differences that can be remedied, respecting diversity of cultures, religions and lifestyles, and challenging oppressive power structures and discriminatory treatment.

It is noticeable that the values of community development, whilst written in various ways, are broadly agreed on throughout the literature. As Banks (2019:9-10) further states there is an abundance of references to community development values in the literature that are notably 'all framed slightly differently but with much in common'. She highlights that the values 'signal a belief in a radically different kind of society and world from the one we currently inhabit'. Reviewing definitions from national networks (IACD 2018, EuCDN 2014, NOS 2015 and AIEB 2016) she concludes the values are listed as 'variations on human rights, social justice, democracy, equality and solidarity' (2019:9). They are indeed worthy if challenging demands.

Bowles (2008) highlights the importance of community development values in determining how practitioners operate in that they work to establish equal, trusting relationships based on openness, honesty, and respect. This underpinning of the values as core to the kinds of relationships central to community development is a key defining feature of practice. Ledwith

(2011:285) suggests what she loosely calls an ‘ideology of equality’ acts as an evaluation gauge for practice ‘informed by values such as mutual respect, reciprocity, dignity, mutuality, trust and co-operation’. Again, worthy demands. Banks (2019) however goes on to highlight practice examples that could be described as reinforcing the status quo. In this way she raises one of the central debates in community development present across the literature, that the values and transformative ideals may unfortunately represent rhetoric over reality. That said she is not alone, there is much criticism of this limitation of practice across the literature (Kenny 2016; Shaw 2016; Craig 2011; Emejulu 2011) fuelling advice for changes to practice.

In this way, Ledwith (2007) argues community development as a way of working towards social change means having to embrace an overt intention of liberation. She calls for praxis and argues community development ‘simply calls for a critical gaze that sets current practice within the bigger picture, building theory in action and acting on theory’ (Ledwith 2007:605). She suggests that this creates a dynamic process of insightful practice that contextualises the experiences of community members within the bigger picture and which, in turn, creates active networks that are catalysts for social change. This is where, she advises that practice can move away from being ameliorative to transformative.

Broadly, this links to whether practice addresses wider societal inequalities and is embedded in the drive for emancipatory change or works with the immediate and local focussing on the ‘symptoms’ of structural inequalities. Banks (2007:135) suggests that having political analysis at the core, a critical edge, demands the ability to undertake a challenging and ‘uneasy’ role. She points to the need for reflexivity on the part of the critical practitioner and a high level of commitment to, and engagement with, values that are grounded in social justice and transformative change. Ledwith (2007:1) has a similar perspective that community

development action needs to be grounded in political process in order to strive for this kind of transformative action and challenge the status quo:

> In failing to be vigilant about changes in the political context we run the risk of developing practice that reinforces discrimination whilst still waving the banner of social justice.

Undoubtedly these are great demands and Westoby (2019:209) points to the challenges of striving for transformation in the 'context of a profoundly inequitable world'. Ledwith (2007b:4) concurs and warns that vigilance is required to prevent distractions and avoid 'slipping into some feel-good, ameliorative, sticking plaster on the wounds of injustice'. This is not simple and requires an awareness of the structures and processes that result in inequalities and a movement away from the 'care, concern and control' dynamic Batsleer (2013) suggests has long been underpinning approaches to charity.

Here Tyler's (2013) thinking about 'revolting subjects' is useful. Her perspective that people who are subjected to social abjection will often in turn revolt is a timely reminder that an awareness of, and respect for, such a drive for activism needs to be central to approaches grounded in solidarity. Toomey (2009:191) highlights the importance of community development practitioner as ally or 'supporter to individuals and communities in need of economic, social or political empowerment'; this is about solidarity, she continues, that embraces the 'spirit of compassion, respect, unity and collective action'. She distinguishes between ally and advocate, suggesting the latter has more political engagement and moral stance and therefore will activate and mobilize alongside people in communities.

Despite this charge with transformation, discourse on a lack of criticality in community development practice is a recurring feature in the literature, with specific comments on the need for it to be embraced simultaneously tinged with regret about limited practice (Bassel & Emejulu 2018; Meade et al 2016; Craig 2011; Ledwith 2011, 2007; Shaw 2011,2004). This relates to the uphill struggle the socio-political context creates alongside the desires and opportunities for change. Meade *et al* (2016:13) acknowledge the ravages of neoliberalism, suggesting it is not the only 'political or ideological game in town' pointing to intersections of oppression and discrimination citing 'imperialism, racism, sexism, homophobia'. Suggesting action needs to rise to the challenge, they simultaneously acknowledge community development practitioners and activists can feel impotent under the weight of such challenges in the strive for transformation. Whilst offering direct challenges to community development, they also go on to state that their intention is not to 'castigate workers, activists or professionals for their 'failure' to deliver on community development's putative radicalism' stating that they know 'the contexts are deeply compromised and obstacles are manifold' (2016:24). Whilst presenting these strong sentiments and strong challenges, they offer the hope for critique rather than despondency.

Popple (2019:53) concurs and suggests that community development must 'reflect and address the complex class, gender and racial divisions…often used to exploit and divide people'. He however goes on to suggest, like Tyler (2013), that these differences can conversely provide the strength needed to fuel 'protest movements, campaigns and local projects' (*ibid*). Moreover, across the literature, community development practice is presented as hopeful; it is fundamentally based on the premise that hope for a better more equal society drives the action taken (Ife 2016; Beck & Purcell 2010). Alinsky (1989:21) talks philosophically of community activism as being 'anchored in optimism', stating that optimism 'brings with it hope, a future with a purpose, and therefore a will to fight for a better world'. This relates to community development work having optimism at the core aiming for positive

social change and believing that it is feasible, much as Giroux (2012:4) points to emergent politics that have revealed a ‘longing for the not-yet-and-still-possible’.

This hope for change both at community and political levels is reflected in Blee’s (2012) research into activist groups in the USA, discussing how they form and whether they have democratic potential. Her ground-breaking research found that early optimism amongst community activists would find them agreeing broad social change aims and that those early stages were vital, the most important in maintaining focus and also possibly the most optimistic. Time would find the activist groups often readdressing their aims for smaller more achievable, still hopeful, objectives. This could go some way to helping to explain the varying definitions of community development practice, as the realities of the weight of transformation is revealed. Hope, nevertheless, is also contextualised and Giroux’s (2012:18) thoughts are a stark reminder of that:

> …as young people are reared in a society in which hope is privatised, it becomes difficult to assume responsibility for the other or to imagine politics as a site to sustain a sense of justice and collective responsibility for the common good.

Accepting this premise means the community development challenge is not simple. Giroux (2012) goes on to suggest that reason combined with compassion can create a different reality from the damaging break down of society and rising individualism created by neoliberalism. He suggests a language for re-situating private troubles as public issues is fundamental to this, enabling a move away from pathologising people. Steinberg (2007) suggests that in this context anger is understandable, perhaps necessary as it might fuel hope for change, allowing practice to look outwards and challenge policy and power dynamics in striving for positive social change. Conversely, drawing on Freire’s (1972)

thinking about love as transformative, Westoby and Dowling (2013:33) point to the need for ‘soulful practice infused by a profound understanding of humanity’. Similarly, Ledwith (2007) suggests using the values as the gauge for transformative intent and a noticing of discomfort when actions move away from them. Moreover, Meade *et al* (2016:24) point to the need for ‘thinking critically and creatively’ about community development’s democratic potential.

This leads to another key aspect of community development in striving for transformation. Giroux (2012:91) points to the ‘age of the disappearing intellectual’ and Ledwith (2016:45) highlights a ‘gaping chasm between theory and practice’ suggesting it is ‘an ongoing weakness for community development’. This, she laments, limits the possibilities for community development in transformative social justice intent. These are strong words, but she is certainly not alone in this, Shaw’s (2011, 2004) work is also peppered with comments about the missing theoretical link, as is Emejulu’s (2015, 2011) and Beck and Purcell’s (2010). Agreeing that practice is weakened by a lack of firm theoretical foundations and the neglect of ideological underpinnings, Henderson (2007:159) argues that practice ‘is not being challenged and supported adequately by theory’ and that ‘the case for bringing theory back into fashion is a strong one’. Ledwith’s most recent writing is still lamenting the lack of engagement with theoretical thinking (2020, 2017). This is because embracing theory is commonly offered as a way of holding onto transformative practice.

Butcher *et al* (2007:53-55) provide a theoretical model of critical community practice and claim it is of use for any type of community work, including community development practice. The model comprises of four specific parts that are inter-connected with ‘critical consciousness’ at the centre, surrounded by and connected to: critical reflection, critical theorising and critical action. Acknowledging some influence by Freire and Gramsci in their model ‘critical consciousness is seen to embrace a set of theoretical assumptions, a commitment to social justice, and a particular set of dispositions on the part of the

practitioner'. They present theoretical assumptions inherent to the model, that of humans as social beings with the 'capacity for rational thought, reflection and imagination' (*ibid*). Ledwith (2007:5) supports these sentiments, calling for a weaving together of theory and practice for clearer articulation and an avoidance of limited 'self-help, local activity'.

The inference across the literature is that the transformative potential of community development leans towards idealistic. In response to that, there is much discourse on how that might be remedied, with suggestions of more critique, more theoretically grounded practice, reflection on the values and a broader awareness of social inequalities, neoliberalism and the resultant need for a 'personal is political' analysis. Whilst some take care to explain their intentions are not to bombast those involved in community development (Meade *et al* 2016), in terms of the transformative intentions there is an edge of criticism evident throughout the discourse.

Community development and dialogue

Finally, this chapter covers a brief introduction to dialogue as a core concept in community development practice. Dialogue plays a central role in the research methodology for this inquiry, inspired by Freire's (2016) thinking, as well as hooks (2003). It is therefore critiqued here initially in relation to community development literature and then more fully discussed in chapter 2.

Dialogue with its transformative potential is often considered to be central to the role of community development (Ledwith 2016; Westoby & Dowling 2013; Beck & Purcell 2010). Westoby and Dowling (2013) suggest dialogue is implicit to most approaches to community development but that it is somewhat taken for granted and given short shrift in much of the

literature. They however make it explicit in their work, framing it as dialogical community development and dialogue as a:

> deep, challenging, responsive, enriching, disruptive encounter and conversation-in-context; and also a mutual and critical process of building shared understanding, meaning and creative action (2013:5).

They are however certainly not alone in highlighting dialogue and Ledwith (2016) is also explicit about the role of dialogue in community development, particularly as influenced by Freire (1972). Grounded in trusting people's ability to think critically and engage together, dialogue is presented as inextricably linked to mutuality as an underpinning ideological perspective in community development that fuels transformative actions. 'Dialogue is much deeper than a chat with someone: it is founded on mutual, reciprocal relations of trust' states Ledwith (2020:98). Butcher (2007:61) also highlights it and simply states that 'dialogue and deliberation are central to the transformatory ambitions of critical practice'. Frost and Seal (2014:10) emphasise a 'commitment to conversation and dialogue' and Gilchrist and Taylor point to 'dialogue, debate and exploration' (2011:111) as central to community development.

Thus, dialogue is portrayed as a catalyst for communication, engagement, participation, conscientisation and social change (Ledwith 2016; Westoby & Dowling 2013; Beck & Purcell 2010; Butcher 2007). There are indeed many more references to dialogue in the literature despite Westoby and Dowling's (2013) contention to otherwise (Ledwith 2020; Gilchrist 2019; McCrea, Meade & Shaw 2017; Seal & Harris 2014; Beck & Purcell 2010; Kelly 2008). There is a common acknowledgement that Freire's thinking (2016:54) is particularly influential here with his perspective on dialogue as communication for emancipation:

> A dialogic relationship – communication and intercommunication among active subjects who are immune to the bureaucratization of their minds and open to discovery and to knowing more – is indispensable to knowledge... In that sense, authoritarian antidialogue violates the nature of human beings, their process of discovery, and it contradicts democracy…Authoritarian power is prying, not curious or questioning. Dialogue, on the other hand, is full of curiosity and unrest.

The relationships at the centre of community development practice are specific, and of fundamental importance. Westoby and Dowling (2013:22) describe the relationships as 'other-orientated, whereby people disrupt self-orientation and instead 'turn to the other', and in that other-orientation there are attempts to reach for mutual understanding of the other'. This is grounded in the kind of curiosity Freire refers to, curiosity about the other but also about society. Similarly drawing from Freire's (1972) thinking, Beck and Purcell (2010:81-82) point to dialogue as a form of 'revolutionary communication' that is inextricably linked to mutuality; dialogue allows for a process of learning and acting together because the starting point is that 'no one knows the full picture' and consequently dialogue creates a fuller picture. In this way, they suggest, dialogue facilitates an intentional road to conscientisation and is consequently potentially transformational. Dialogue is deemed central to the development of these engaged, critical relationships.

Further acknowledging the influence of Freire (1972) in learning for social transformation, Westoby and Dowling (2013:15) suggest that practice cannot be reduced to 'mechanistic process' and 'recipes' such as toolkits, rather it has to stay framed as 'social practice of solidarity and political contestation'. This is important and connects with Bhattacharyya's (2004) criticisms of relying on skills-based approaches. A skills-based attempt at dialogue in action is insufficient and is further explained by Freire (2016:49) as he espouses that:

> Dialogism must not be understood as a tool used by the educator, at times, in keeping with his or her political choices… [it is] a sign of the educator's stand.

This is important as it relates to the democratic values of community development and presents dialogue as a deliberate democratic encounter. West (1993:xiii) defines Freire's thinking as a 'fusion of social theory, moral outrage and political praxis' and Ledwith and Springett (2010:146) draw on it and call dialogue an 'act of engagement in a space of mutual respect'. In this way, dialogue is a way of fundamentally engaging together in a process that questions those things in life that are accepted as norms of everyday, a form of critical interrogation (hooks 1993). As we have seen in a neoliberal context those everyday norms can feed inequalities and oppression, and so in community development dialogical engagement is therefore central to the aim of transformation.

The concepts of reciprocity and mutuality help illustrate the core kind of relationships that are espoused to make a difference in community development and illustrate why relationships in which one party is referred to as the client are anathema to the practice. Rather, as Freire (1972:100) espouses reciprocity and mutual engagement in dialogue are founded in relationships of respect and 'humble, loving and courageous encounter'. This is further elucidated by an approach that espouses participation, self-determination, and voluntary association (Beck & Purcell 2010).

As Bhattacharyya (2004:13) explains this situates in opposition to a climate of 'chronic dependency' with givers and receivers of service. Much as Batsleer (2013) points to the care and control dynamic of charity, Bhattacharyya points to welfare providers actively discouraging 'clients' from civic engagement and critical consciousness (Freire 1973). On

the contrary, grounding in dialogue means community development is able to relate to ‘people as citizens rather than the frequently damaged public service-related identities such as those of ‘client’, ‘claimant’, or ‘tenant’’ (Hoggett, Mayo & Miller 2009:43). This is important and is grounded in an attitude to others that avoids a dynamic of superiority, one-way expertise and control, with a recognition of people as equal citizens and agents of social change who can engage in dialogue from the outset, not as people who need to be ‘developed’ before they are allowed to participate.

Acknowledging difference and complexity, Mayo (2019:6) points to the importance of engaging in dialogue ‘on the basis of mutual trust, rather than attempting to harangue people and communities for being reactionary, racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic or whatever’. Bhattacharyya (2004:12) points to human agency as people’s capacity to ‘order their world…have powers to define themselves as opposed to being defined by others [and] to create, reproduce, change, and live according to their own meaning systems’. This perhaps reveals the key defining feature of community development practice that holds it apart from other practices and this attitude is what enables and allows dialogical relationships to develop.

Conclusion

Across the literature the scope of community development is presented as transformative values-driven process, as practice, as a profession, as an academic discipline and as activism or engagement with social movements. There is broad agreement on the values driving community development as being a commitment to equality, social justice, democratic process, human rights, mutuality, self-determination and solidarity, or variations thereof. However, it is complex with nuances in definitions and intentions leading to it commonly described as contested practice.

The nature of community development as contested practice is therefore a significant driver for this research since the shared meanings around the values and broad intentions are peppered by nuances in the way it is defined and practiced. Community development is influenced by split historical roots, by differing ideological underpinnings and intentions, and by interpretations of the many contested concepts at its heart. Operating in the challenging context of social inequalities and charged with making a difference in neoliberal-led funding limitations, it can manifest as practice that feeds dominant narratives and encourages a 'fitting in', or counter hegemonic political process, or indeed somewhere in between. My observation in this realm of contested practice is that the differences matter, but more so they reveal the ongoing need to investigate the nature, scope, and intentions of community development, through the lens of those who practice it.

I conclude that there is indeed mileage in entering into dialogue with community development workers to hear their perspectives and definitions. The literature throws up many challenges to practice, questioning whether it is more rhetoric over reality, unthinking, apolitical, or lacking criticality. There is therefore a live need to research how current practice looks and is articulated by practitioners who may shine a light on practice and bring something important to the debate.

CHAPTER 2: The Research Framework

Synopsis

This chapter introduces the overall research framework with an analysis of the methodology and methods used and the case for framing this study as a qualitative inquiry. It also covers the role of dialogue in the research methods utilised, epistemology, ontology and the influence of community development values and the democratisation of research, on the study design.

Introduction to the research framework

The aim of this inquiry is to illuminate community development practice by foregrounding practitioners' perspectives on their approaches to their practice. In striving to explore how community development workers articulate and define their practice, what drives their thinking, why they approach their practice in the way they do and to what end, I found myself at the beginning of a long journey. The sojourn involved learning my craft as researcher but perhaps more importantly learning to design a research framework for this study that was fit for purpose. I took time to engage in a lengthy process of designing the research methods. This was partly driven by my desire to educate myself on a broad spectrum of social research approaches, but also to stay grounded in my commitment to the community development values that drive my worldview.

A qualitative, interpretivist framework was best suited as an approach for the research and this chapter explicitly presents the chosen paradigm with the related research methods I utilised. I offer some acknowledgement of approaches I rejected in order to strengthen my articulation of the choices made. I present the research framework with the epistemological and ontological perspectives driving the design of my inquiry, the influence of the democratisation of social research on the methodology and methods utilised, an analysis of the importance of dyadic dialogical interviewing as research method to the framing of the research, and the use of reflexivity in my role as researcher.

The study paradigm and epistemological considerations

The broad spectrum of possible approaches available to the social researcher in attempting to understand aspects of the social world, and contribute to knowledge, can be a confusing minefield but also a catalyst for innovation. Sarantakos (2005:4) frames social research as

the '*intellectual tool'* of the social scientist for 'purposive and rigorous investigation that aims to generate new knowledge' and he invites us to see it as a dynamic process that is about discovering new ideas, 'expanding the horizons of the known' and drawing 'new conclusions about all aspects of life' (2005:4). The differences in how such understanding is arrived at and what it aims to achieve go some way to illustrating the differences between the social research paradigms and is helpful in illuminating the framework for this study. Guba and Lincoln (1994:105) explain this as the 'basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigation' and this is important.

Put simply, Thomas (2014) advises that the social researcher needs to know whether they are operating within a positivist or interpretivist tradition. Henn, Weinstein and Foard (2009:133) explain that 'Quantitative approaches are typically associated with positivist perspectives in social science research', and usually typify surveys and experiments. Qualitative research is generally more 'associated with an interpretive perspective in social research' Henn *et al* (2009:175) continue, and in doing so point to it being more about attempting to understand people's 'ideas, attitudes, motives and intentions'. However, Silverman (2011) challenges the researcher to be wary of overly simplistic and dichotomous comparisons between the paradigms and suggests they have much in common. Both qualitative and quantitative researchers use numbers and words, he suggests, both can be concerned with meanings and behaviours, both can work from hypotheses and both can result in generalisations (although the latter two are more common in positivist practice). There is more to it than simply knowing, and choosing, the paradigm.

Kumar (2014) contends that a clear research framework is vital for different reasons. At a basic level it details how you plan to undertake the research in order to answer the research question you have posed; but at a deeper level the framework ought to be robust enough to ensure you can ethically obtain trustworthy answers to the research problem. In this sense,

ethical considerations and trustworthy answers are inextricably linked to the researcher's worldview and beliefs about the nature of knowledge.

Oakley (1999) also advises against engaging with basic paradigm wars, suggesting the priority is to present clearly why one has been chosen in order to address the research question, rather than whether one might be superior to another. This is important because she is touching on another crucial consideration involving the power and status of knowledge. Some argue that the vast world of social research remains dominated by positivist traditions (Thomas 2014), some by Western epistemologies (Santos 2014) and others by patriarchal perspectives (Deutch 2004). If we accept knowledge is created and understood in different ways, and significantly that social research suffers from imbalances in knowledge weightings, it becomes vital to lay bare the guiding principles of research engagement in attempting to address the research question, especially for qualitative approaches.

Qualitative inquiry is indeed often criticised for a lack of clarity (Sarantakos 2005), suffering from endless possibilities for a framework design. Therefore, in order to avoid assumptions that could result in ethical or trustworthiness challenges, it must be explicit (Silverman 2011). More so if we subscribe to the view that the broad spectrum of possible social research approaches remains dominated by positivist research with its influential history grounded in attempts to emulate the natural sciences (Flick 2015; Thomas 2014; Punch 2009; Creswell 2003; Winter 2000). Whilst this may not be problematic, by definition, it highlights the potential for assumptions to be at play if the framework is not clear. Acknowledging and circumventing such assumptions opens possibilities for broadening epistemologies and essentially highlighting and respecting different perspectives on knowledge.

In this way certain feminist perspectives challenge the domination of positivist patriarchal approaches to knowledge, arguing they are problematic as they can result in marginalised voices, particularly women's, being missed (Fraser 2020; Emejulu 2011; Jayaratne & Stewart 1991; Oakley 1981). Equally, challenges to western-centric paradigms (Bhambra & Santos 2017) open awareness of the ironies of social research that claim to 'empower' and give 'voice' whilst holding colonial lenses and inadvertently reinforcing inequalities. There is much to learn from this as it helps unveil some of the contemporary challenges to social research and to the design of this inquiry.

It may not be an overly simplistic perspective to suggest that because of the assumed status of positivism qualitative research, by way of comparison, commonly remains defined in literature by what it is not. This is illustrated by Punch's, admittedly simplified, definition: '[it is] empirical research where the data are not in the form of numbers' (Punch 2009:30). Similarly, but expanding somewhat, Carter and Little (2002:1316) suggest the qualitative 'researcher relies on text data rather than numerical data, [and] analyses those data in their textual form rather than converting them to numbers for analysis'. Whilst this goes some way to illustrating a qualitative research framework, alone it is potentially problematic. It feeds into one of the criticisms of qualitative inquiries that Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014) point to, namely an over-reliance on simply describing the research methods rather than presenting the full conceptual framework guiding the process. Evidently, such an oversight potentially weakens the research.

Accepting this perspective makes the need for clarity pressing and at the risk of falling into the overly common 'qualitative inquiry is not' phenomenon, my objective with this research was not to engage as an outsider experimenting and measuring using a fixed framework, rather it was to understand 'emergent patterns' as an 'insider, interacting with participants' (Thomas 2013:111). This was done in order to hear the participants' voices and

perspectives, whilst respecting them as experts on their circumstances with the ability to articulate that clearly. Broadly, though not exclusively, this approach is situated more readily in a qualitative paradigm.

Krauss's (2005:759) contention that qualitative research is commonly 'based on relativistic, constructivist ontology that posits there is no objective reality' is instructive. His perspective is that qualitative inquiry is philosophical with many realities created by differing perspectives, it is developmental and emergent, that understanding often comes from studying phenomenon in situ, that meanings are created rather than being static truths, and that findings come from interpretations and understandings. Whilst this is not an exclusive definition, it is usefully illustrative of the epistemological and ontological perspectives framing this inquiry.

Since the world of qualitative inquiry is vast, with wide-ranging and potentially conflicting practices, the broad spectrum of possibilities can simultaneously be one of the strengths of the paradigm, not least because it allows the researcher to construct creative design processes (Sarantakos 2005). Interestingly, Maxwell (2013:3) goes as far as calling this a 'do-it-yourself' process and perhaps in doing so illustrates the positive possibilities of drawing from different approaches for a bespoke framework; admittedly however whilst simultaneously opening it up for criticisms of vague practice that at best 'settles surprisingly little' (Silverman 2011:3) and at worst produces research that is naïve and inadvertently untrustworthy (Thomas 2014). Revisiting Oakley's (2004:191) contention that the research design fitting the research question is enormously important because of an ethical requirement to avoid irresponsibly expecting 'people to take part in badly designed research' is useful.

I was aware of this challenge as I ventured into designing a bespoke research framework and I contend there are further considerations that come with undertaking research in the field of community development that relate to its values-led nature (Cox 2008; Green 2008; Ledwith 2005). As community development practitioners subscribe to a values' base that espouses mutuality, equity, participation, self-determination, voluntary association and collective action for change (Craig et al 2011; Beck & Purcell 2010; Butcher 2007), I also subscribe to these values and it follows that my research framework ought not to be at odds with them. Accepting this means that Kumar's (2014) second point above, about robust and ethical research frameworks, requires even more careful thought. If we contend that ethical considerations are intertwined with community development values (Banks 2019; Pyles 2019; Westoby 2019; Banks 2014), how the research framework design incorporates the values becomes critical. A central consideration throughout this dissertation has therefore been to critique my research approach and thereby challenge myself to design a robust research framework that avoids jarring with the values and principles of community development (Banks 2019; Ledwith 2011). Achieving this, I believed, would give the inquiry more legitimacy and add to the body of knowledge on community development research methods.

In this way, my commitment was to a research process that would avoid what Packham (1998:249) describes as 'research methods that are exploitative and deskilling of their subjects, and therefore inappropriate to use as part of community development'. My ongoing reflections on the nature of research has at times felt challenging, however Banks' (2014:18) words were an important leveller with her reminder that the research inquiry 'cannot be divorced from personal commitments and values or from the wider political and social contexts in which it takes place'. In accepting this, it follows that a robust, ethical, values-based research framework was vital to this inquiry. The growing trend towards democratising social research opens up more possibilities for methodologies that align with these values

and that attempt to balance power, work 'with' rather than 'on' people, and that strive to foreground participants as experts on their situations rather than passive objects of a researcher's expertise (Edwards and Brannelly 2017; Crow 2012).

My inquiry was therefore influenced by these concepts and grounded in the contention that foregrounding practitioners' perspectives would provide an authentic picture of what they do and that their perspectives could legitimately add to the existing literature on practice. How I gained that data was crucial in terms of ethics and trustworthiness, therefore, embracing my epistemological perspective, and influenced by community development practice, I designed a dialogical approach to the data collection and analysis.

Situated in the epistemological perspective that knowledge is created through interactions, the intention with this inquiry was depth, subjective engagement, and being in relationship with the participants and with their data, in mutual inquiry, in order to illuminate their practice thereby adding to knowledge about community development practice. With there being many considerations for this research framework, Miles ***et al***'s (2014) contention that a conceptual framework can help the qualitative researcher move beyond the potential pitfalls of inadvertently untrustworthy designs is instructive. Accepting that means it is not enough to state that this was a qualitative study that embraced a holistic approach in a natural setting and that encouraged the active involvement of participants (Creswell 2003). More detail is required, and the conceptual framework given in Table 1 further clarifies my approach.

Table 1: Conceptual Framework

Research question: What can we learn about the meaning of community development as transformative practice from contemporary practitioners in Scotland?			
Insider status:	Participants	Critical theoretical	Values

Qualitative inquiry: interpretivist, iterative, collaborative. Knowledge as created. Democratisation of research: social justice, feminist, community development values, equalities; participants as expert. Interviews in dyads using dialogue as meaning making process – Freire, Bohm, hooks. Thematic analysis, dialogue & Freire/ feminist/community development literature as outside authority. Findings come from interpretations & understandings. Reflexivity.	Community workers are known and selected for defining their practice as community development and transformative. Willing to engage in dialogue on their work with another CD worker Respected as experts on their own approaches. Selected as they articulate their practice in ways that suggest they are striving for transformation. Is practice limited & unpolitical or striving for social change?	Making meaning through dialogue: Freire, Bohm, hooks, Ledwith on placatory or emancipatory practice. Literature & theoretical underpinnings as 'outside authority' in dialogue with participants as experts, for analysis. Eclectic range of relevant literature for analysis and Freire: conscientisation & hope; hooks love ethic; Feminist analysis, intersectionality.	Democratisation of social research and community development values to underpin the research design. Particularly in data gathering process & act as tool for reflexivity: mutuality, equity, power balancing, collective, social justice. Participants' voices leading data presentation. Power, equalising, reflexivity.

To clarify, this inquiry was interpretivist, it used a qualitative methodology, grounded in the epistemological perspective that knowledge is socially created; the researcher had insider status; dialogue was a central tenet with the use of dyadic dialogical interviews as data collection methods, and thematic analysis and dialogue to make sense of the data; participants' voices were regarded as authoritative along with literature as outside authority (including Freire's (1979) concepts of hope and conscientisation, hooks' (2001) love ethic and a feminist analysis as critical lens); finally, dialogue and reflexivity for trustworthiness.

In addition to Miles *et al*'s (2015) conceptual framework advice, Creswell & Miller (2000) point to the use of thick descriptions as a way of working to ensure rigour in qualitative inquiry and with a view to presenting a trustworthy picture, it is worth taking a little time to detail the research process; the following pages therefore present that detail.

Insider status: foregrounding myself as the researcher

One of the key concepts in qualitative social research relates to the central role of the researcher. Put simply, Fusch & Ness (2015:1411) stress that in qualitative inquiry the 'researcher is the data collection instrument' and cannot separate themselves from any aspect of the study. This therefore makes a level of self-awareness vital and Chenai (2011) highlights that the researchers' values and biases need foregrounding. More than that, Dibley (2011) stresses the need for the researcher to understand their own personal lens and the potential impact of it, before they can successfully hear and understand the participants' perspectives. My role in this study was integral to the whole process and some description of me and my values and ideologies is therefore relevant in relation to this inquiry.

I came to this study with insider status, driven by my observations of community development practice from literature, ongoing reflexive analysis of my own practice and my analysis of the field in Scotland as a Community Education academic. I read prolifically about community development and I am particularly interested in how practice articulates with theoretical underpinnings and definitions of community development. I understand community development as optimistic practice that comes with transformative social intent (Ledwith 2020; Kenny 2016; Shaw 2004) and my interest with this research spun around what community development could achieve.

A white, Scottish woman, shaped and formed by lived experiences, I grew up in relative poverty and I reflect on myself as a child who felt and noticed injustice and the relentless ramifications, insecurities and stresses that so often come with living in poverty (Tyler 2020; Naven, Egan, Sosu, & Spenser 2019; Wilkinson & Pickett 2018; McGarvey 2017; Dorling 2013). Notably, I saw and felt the impact of it both on myself, as well as others, and in many ways those experiences remain with me as scars and as limitations on my confidence levels, but simultaneously as drivers for me in striving for positive social change.

I continue to see acute levels of poverty (Congreve 2019; Kenway *et al* 2015) from my somewhat privileged position as an academic and I also see neoliberalism driving an increasing inequalities gap (Stiglitz 2016; Giroux 2012; Lister 2010; Wilkinson & Pickett 2010). I frame poverty as a structural problem in society (Tyler 2020; Dorling 2013; Alcock 2006) rather than an individual weakness (Murray 1990) and I view the current austerity measures in the United Kingdom as destructive neoliberal forces that limit certain people's lives, perpetuate hunger, homelessness, poverty and social inequalities across society, and globally (Tyler 2013; Lister 2010). I care about that, I am committed to striving for a more equal society, and to engaging in research that produces work that has relevance to the 'greater good'.

I situate my childhood poverty in relation to gender inequalities and my mother's strength, and vulnerabilities, as a lone parent in 1960s Scotland, were equally influential on me. Alongside that, I do not remember not having a feminist perspective. Undergraduate studies in sociology widened my societal exposure and both strengthened, broadened, and legitimised my standpoint. I am acutely aware of my ongoing learning journey through

feminism, originally grounded in first wave white anti-patriarchal perspectives I was rightly challenged to broaden my thinking, as described by Griffins and Braidotti (2002:221):

> The move in feminism from notions of universal sisterhood and equality of oppressedness within patriarchy, to an understanding of the role that differences among women play in the formation and maintenance of power structures and inequality that affect women differentially, was inter alia spearheaded by black American feminists.

I acknowledge my engagement in lifelong learning (Tett 2003) and my developing engagement with feminism embodies intersectionality and a drive to create a gender equal society. I believe achieving that means everyone will benefit (Emejulu 2015; Adichie 2014; hooks 2000). Such a definition ought not to be read as a simplification, much as I acknowledge I am continually learning and developing, I do not underestimate the complexity of change needed to achieve such hope for equality. As Arruzza, Bhattacharya and Fraser (2019:85) point out in their 'restless anti-capitalist feminism' I concur that we:

> can never be satisfied with equivalences until we have equality, never satisfied with legal rights until we have justice, and never satisfied with democracy until individual freedom is calibrated on the basis of freedom for all.

Their observations are educative. Equally, I learned much from my lengthy community development practice focussing on gender inequalities and poverty. Significantly, a decade of working alongside diverse women in a peripheral housing estate in Scotland educated me. The daily challenges of living on low income, as lone parents, so often enduring violence and abuse, in a 'ghettoised' context of limited local resources was infuriating to observe. I

have never known women who worked so hard in life yet were so readily stigmatised as ‘unworthy’, ‘benefit scroungers’, ‘aggressive’ or ‘feckless’. I learned the power of a ‘personal is political’ (Millet 1969) lens in action as we engaged community development processes to highlight violence against women, to influence policy and practice, and to educate widely. Women who were written off in society and handed anti-depressants with messages of ‘feel a little better in awful circumstances’ engaged in dialogue, studied, noticed injustice in action, campaigned, spoke at events and challenged policy makers to do better. Both the injustices of the ‘feminisation of poverty’ and the strength of mutual action remain with me. My lengthy practice subsequently involved wider city-wide, and national roles, in which I was party to the broad approaches undertaken in the name of community development ultimately ranging from dishing out sticky plasters to politically motivated actions for social change. The learning remains with me.

All of this clearly influences who I am as a researcher. Deutch (2004) points particularly to the influence of feminism on stressing the need to know our positionalities as researchers. I deliberately reveal my partialities as they inevitably have some bearing on the inquiry, on my drive to undertake the inquiry and on my approach, analysis, and commitment to the research process. I acknowledge these as present and throughout the research process I have sought to notice, to reflect and to further educate myself.

Acknowledging the centrality of the role of the researcher in qualitative inquiry, particularly as the data collection tool, is not in itself sufficient. With similarities to Dibley (2011), Fusch & Ness (2015) suggest that the more familiar the researcher is with their personal lens, the more able they are to hear and foreground participants’ perspectives. Being aware of my lens, my ontological position, meant I could engage reflexivity to stay grounded in analysis throughout the study, basically to keep a critical eye on my role and positioning (Cox 2008).

Reflexivity has therefore played an important part throughout as my lens for ‘combining the inner and outer world…to arrive at a deeper understanding of an issue or problem and one’s part in it’ (Ledwith & Springett 2010), thus in scrutinising my research and my critical role in it. Finlay (2002) points to reflexivity as a tool for ensuring rigour and accounting for bias throughout the research process and I engaged with it as a tool to attempt to ‘assure rigor and trustworthiness’ at all stages of the research inquiry (Grix 2007:1376), both through journal writing and dialogue. Fook (1999) highlights the role of reflexivity as a process for critiquing power and the creation of knowledge and so this involved deeper questioning, not only of my skills in research methods, but a constant scrutiny of epistemological and ontological concerns.

This evidently relates to ethical sensitivity. With ethics related to but not restricted by the process of obtaining ethical consent (in this case from the University of Dundee, see Appendix 1), Holloway and Biley (2011) contend ethical dilemmas are at play in every stage of the inquiry. For me, a central ethical consideration throughout related to my ability to ‘walk the talk’ and embrace more democratic research values. If I was (and am) serious about avoiding the ‘researcher as expert, participant as lesser trap’, then I had an ethical responsibility to apply congruence throughout the process, and reflexivity was a tool for that. In many ways the dialogical approach also enabled me to do this, however it remains an ongoing consideration for me, particularly as I walked away with the participants’ perspectives and developed my thesis.

Nonetheless, in line with considering the democratisation of research and particularly how my role as researcher was central, Ledwith’s (2007:602) challenge that ‘being critical involves being self-critical in relation to our own power wherever that may be’ was an

important consideration for me throughout. My openness to self-critique, discussion and dialogue as the researcher allowed for dialogical analysis that was central to ensuring the depictions of participants' voices was an accurate reflection of how they articulated their practice (see chapter 3). Alongside that, Ledwith & Springett's (2010:157) framing of reflexivity as the ability to engage inwards as the researcher but significantly also 'outward to the cultural, social, historical, linguistic, political and other forces that shape the context of the inquiry' challenged me to embrace literature throughout my reflexive engagement.

My commitment to the values of community development clearly influenced my choice of research paradigm, the research question, the framework, the methods of analysis, as well as my decisions about the way forward. I lay that out for scrutiny, as an acknowledgement of the researcher as an important tool in the process of qualitative inquiry (Thomas 2013) but also as a celebration of what community development has to offer the research process (Cox 2008).

Much as Bohm (2010) describes the world as an 'unbroken flowing whole', I see my choice of methodology and methods being articulated with community development values and principles and hoping for an unbroken, flowing approach. Bohm's (2010) message that we 'have to have enough faith in our world-view to work from it, but not that much that we think it's the final answer' allows for a creation, a flow, and the permission to start from our existing position and see what comes. I designed a research process that had a robust framework but with epistemological and ontological underpinnings that allowed for an iterative process grounded in dialogue, space, and flow.

My own reflections as I write up this thesis are that this inquiry used my reflective feminist perspective along with my knowledge and experience of community development as a catalyst for the design of the framework and the approach throughout.

Designing the approach to data collection

Drawing from Denzin & Lincoln's (2011) comprehensive critique of qualitative research since the 1900s, Wilson, Onwuegbuzie & Manning (2016:1550) point to four broad categories of data collection techniques in qualitative research: 'talk… observations… images… and documents'. For this inquiry talk was the preferred data collection method since the focus was to foreground participants' perspectives but also because the research framework involved mutuality, 'working with' and particularly trusting participants as experts on their own work.

Interestingly, Thomas (2013) points to different ways of capturing participants' voices such as through video with technology such as *Voxpop,* and Deutch (2004) points to the feminist drive to use these approaches to foreground marginalised voices. However, the limitations of these approaches as potentially less engaged, distant, and lacking in possibilities for mutuality, make them unsuitable to the ontological framing of the inquiry.

The interview is one of the best-known qualitative data gathering methods according to Punch (2009) who highlights its merits in powerfully uncovering and illuminating other peoples' constructions of reality. He is not alone in this and similarly, Webb and Glesne (1992:130) frame qualitative interviewing as 'conversation with a purpose', and Brinkmann and Kvale (2015:25) as a 'specific form of conversation'. With the perspectives of the research participants and their words central to this study, the use of qualitative interviewing

to gather data as much as possible through their eyes (Sturges & Hanrahan 2004) had clear benefits for the purpose of this inquiry. The question of how to undertake interviews was however an important consideration.

Whilst acknowledging different approaches, Kvale (1996) points to individual interviewing as the most common qualitative research method. More recently, Denham & Onwuegbuzie's (2013) broad analysis of approaches to data collection in qualitative inquiry uncovered some important trends and revealed a strong preponderance for, and perhaps over-reliance on, the individual interview. It can be easy to simply follow suit, they suggest, but the limitations of an individual approach made it unfit for the purpose of my inquiry with individualisation being one of the problematic neoliberal impacts on community development practice. The potential to individualise the research process quite simply jarred with my ontological perspective.

More than that a simple individual question and answer type approach had the potential to set up a dynamic in which the participants were responding to me and my agenda rather than from their expertise and their agency. Managing an interview process that would enable me to avoid inadvertently stepping into the role of expert who imposes their views and their practice on people, or even 'taking on an unquestioned authority in speaking on behalf of others, however good our intentions' Ledwith (2007:604), was a vital consideration. Indeed, avoiding the researcher 'as information miner' was an important challenge (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015:57).

Clearly, the notion of mining for information, extracting it and taking it from participants individually does not sit comfortably alongside the nature of this research project that was striving for a 'doing with' relationship rather than an 'extracting from' dynamic. The potential

for using the qualitative interview process as a feminist inspired collective, subjective process that could bring the researcher and the participants closer together in terms of the power dynamic of the inquiry (Harding 2003) in collaborative endeavour to make meaning, was important. That said, whilst there are broad claims of a lesser power gap between researcher and participants in qualitative inquiry, as opposed to the more objective quantitative paradigm (Kumar 2014), power dynamics remain an important consideration throughout (Cox *et al* 2008). To that end, Brinkmann and Kvale (2015:37) warn that the qualitative interview should not simply be considered as a 'completely open and free dialogue between egalitarian partners'.

In response to these dilemmas, Edwards & Brannelly (2017) point to the relatively recent and growing move towards democratising social research, notably including feminist-inspired approaches, as a process that allows for a framing of the research inquiry using the principles of equity and a belief in people's agency. They embrace methodologies that 'share a common aim of disrupting the imbalances of power between researcher and researched' (Edwards & Brannelly 2017:272). This allows for the creation of a process in which the researcher's desire for knowledge can have somewhat lesser status than the participants' undiluted picture. My community development values underpinning my role as researcher are a constant leveller and reminder of this dynamic. In response to that challenge, the very nature of this inquiry therefore required a creative, flexible design. This would allow for a flowing process in the creation of the data and in the foregrounding of participants' voices in as open and genuine a manner as possible, but importantly grounded in their agency.

In contrast to researcher as miner, Brinkmann & Kvale (2015:57) usefully offer the notion of the researcher 'as a traveler', suggesting that the approach we use creates a 'process of knowledge collection [miner]' or a process of 'knowledge construction [traveller]'. This notion of travelling and of creating, rather than digging for, knowledge connected in my mind with

the community development concept of dialogue as a dynamic, engaged, conversational, mutual, meaning-making process (Westoby & Dowling 2020; hooks 2003; Bell *et a*l 1990). As discussed in Chapter 1 dialogue is defined by Westoby and Dowling (2013:5) as a 'deep, challenging, responsive, enriching, disruptive encounter and conversation-in-context'. It presented a way forward for the interviewing process. Notably, Sinha & Back (2014:479) point to dialogue as part of a process that enables participant and researcher to come together in a movement beyond the restricted and potentially hegemonic approach of mining for information. It is therefore worth taking some time to detail the role of dialogue as a central concept utilised in different ways throughout this research inquiry.

Dialogue as research methods

Dialogue, at the heart of community development practice, relies on a mutual dynamic and as noted by Freire (1987:3):

> dialogue seals the act of knowing, which is never individual, even though it has individual dimension.

It aligns with principles of equity and agency central to the more democratic approaches to research, and therefore provided a participatory framework for my research. As we have seen, perspectives from literature (Barr 2014; Westoby & Dowling 2013; Ledwith 2011) and discipline specific bodies (euCDN, IACD, SCDC), stress the role of community development in working in dialogue with people towards positive social change. This is strongly influenced by the work of Freire (1979) and it was indeed my reading of Freire in conversation with Shor (Shor & Freire 1987) and with Horton (Bell, Gaventa & Peters (1990) that provided the catalyst for my innovative use of dialogue as research methods.

In those books, their dialogue reveals their perspectives on practice; the exchanges are lengthy and engaged, involving two people in dialogue with each other throughout the books, creating a vivid picture of their perspectives. Much as Bohm (1996:7) states that people involved in dialogue are willing to engage in a process that involves 'questioning their fundamental assumptions', the Freire dialogues create a vivid description of practice but also vitally demonstrate the power of dialogue in action. The books ignited my curiosity and led me to create an approach to my study that could strive to illuminate practice using dialogue in a similar way.

Westoby and Dowling (2013) stress the transformative powers of dialogue as community development, and Beck and Purcell (2010:28) suggest unconscious biases and assumptions are exposed through dialogue. This is also illustrated by a more feminist perspective involving hooks in dialogue with Scapp (hooks 2003:111) when she reflects to him:

> …our dialogues together stimulate us. They lead us back to the drawing board and help us strengthen ideas [to engage with] the very locations of privilege, race, and gender that you have so consistently critiqued.

Responding to her, Scapp acknowledges the role of dialogue to 'challenge you and keep you honest about your position'. Notably, hooks is not alone in espousing the feminist power of dialogue as a critical intersectional process that can challenge the dominant cultural discourse (Frank 2000). This relates closely to Freire's (1970) depiction of dialogue as communication for emancipation grounded in the ability to trust in people's ability to think, critique and take action on their own behalf, as he suggests:

> Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it…Through dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don't know, we can act critically to transform reality (Shor & Freire 1987:98-99).

This notion of meeting to 'reflect on reality', as a powerful transformative process, is illustrative of the objective of my research and therefore of import to this inquiry in different ways. Freire's statement describes the core community development process and highlights the centrality of dialogue to that as a collaborative catalyst for change, and his description also neatly applies to my use of dialogue as a dynamic research method that allows for reflection, meaning-making and rigour.

Nonetheless, dialogue is another term that is broadly used and Bohm (1996:8) laments that 'clearly a lot of what is called "dialogue" is not dialogue in the way that I am using the word' and this is important. It can be used synonymously with conversation (Jeffs & Smith 2005) or discussion (Bohm 1996), or even somewhat simplistically in qualitative interviewing where the responses to questions can be considered dialogue, particularly in the more unstructured approaches to interviewing (Thomas 2013). However, as Freire and hooks do, Bohm (1996:7) suggests that dialogue is much more than conversation, discussion, and response to questions, and that it allows both for mutual meaning and mutual gain:

> in a dialogue, however, nobody is trying to win... there is a different sort of spirit to it… a dialogue is something more of a common participation, in which we are not playing a game against each other, but with each other. In dialogue, everybody wins.

Similarly, Gadamer (1989) suggests that dialogue is about creating dynamic new perspectives on the topic being discussed and fundamentally about developing new

meanings and understandings. This was my intention for using it as a central concept throughout the research in the interviews, the participant verification process, and in the analysis of data. Dialogue allowed for a collaborative meaning-making process and Ledwith's words are illustrative of this:

> …any theory of emancipation must pay attention to consonance with its practice. For instance, an ideology of equality gives rise to a methodology that is collaborative, not authoritative. Collaboration is founded on dialogue, and dialogue leads to working with not on people (2005:260).

Dialogue as a central concept throughout this research was undoubtedly strongly influenced by Freirean thinking, however it was also influenced by feminist thinking. Frisby, Maguire and Reid (2009) point to the intentionality of a feminist lens in research for revealing and countering dominant discourses. hooks (1993), Weiler (1991) and Ledwith (2016) all suggest a Freirean feminist lens embraces critical consciousness as well as a 'personal is political' framing. This enables us to move beyond divisive analyses that situate in false hierarchies of oppression towards 'intersecting, overlapping and interlocking' analyses (Ledwith 2016:93). Hill Collins (1990) suggests we need to engage in a constant dialogue in order to move forwards collectively in learning for social change. My research involved constant dialogue and revealed practice that moves and morphs through dialogue.

In terms of research trustworthiness, Gadamer (1989:367) names dialogue as a process that in itself 'overcomes all opposition that tries to limit its validity', because he suggests 'what is said is continually turned into the uttermost possibilities of its rightness and truth'. These may seem like grand claims however, dialogue as a process of validity is also highlighted by Freire in conversation with Shor (1987) where the rigour of their discussion unfolds a story of

depth and, in this way is a work in progress, as a robust, dynamic act of meaning making. Sinha and Back (2014) point to the engaged nature of dialogic research and particularly the ability to create an environment and 'spirit of trust and mutual respect' (2014:485).

The following section moves into more detail on the research methods and explains my use of dyadic dialogical interviewing as data collection method.

Dyadic dialogical interviewing

I developed a process of interviewing two participants together, in dialogue with each other on their practice. I took the notion of 'interviews with a purpose*'* (Punch 2009) somewhat further and used the interview process to create a dynamic of 'partners in dialogue' (Gadamer 1989:367). Interviewing two participants together is somewhat unusual and requires some elucidation.

With a long history as a legitimate qualitative research method predominantly in health and counselling (Morris 2001; Arskey 1996), interviewing two people at the same time is commonly referred to as 'joint interviews, couple interviews, conjoint interviews, and dyadic interviews' (Polak and Green 2015:1638). In a comprehensive review of literature Wilson, Onwuegbuzie & Manning (2016) conclude that interviewing participants in twos remains uncommon as an approach to data collection in qualitative inquiry and that it is commonly omitted from textbooks and research literature. They highlight that it is also referred to as paired interviews and they developed what they call 'paired depth interviewing'. Whilst espousing its many benefits, they call for more research and analysis of it as a method (Wilson *et al* 2016).

Polak and Green (2015:1638) refer to joint interviewing as ‘an encounter between an interviewer and a dyad: two interviewees’. They also describe it as an unusual but growing research method and concur that it remains ‘under-explored methodologically and largely ignored in textbook coverage of interviewing’. Pollack and Green (2015) also highlight paired interviewing as more common in health and counselling research, specifically with pairs of participants commonly constituted by people in personal relationships with each other, often, family members.

Nonetheless, whilst literature highlights the preponderance of paired interviewing in health and counselling, this is by no means exclusive and Houssart & Evens (2011) used paired interviewing with two children together, but this time as a task-based exercise researching mathematical understandings. Significantly, they also highlight a dearth of literature on this as a research method. On a related but slightly tangential note, Highet (2003) also highlights its use but with young people’s friendship groups and notes its strengths as an approach because it allows both for agreement, and for participants to challenge each other as trusted participants, thereby creating a trustworthy picture.

All in all, although not a new approach, interviewing participants in pairs is an under-utilised research method that could be further developed. Notably, my interest in dyadic interviewing was not about aiming for psychological depth nor to measure engagement in tasks, rather it was to use dialogue to illuminate community development practice. The introduction of an emphasis on dialogue between the two participants to this dynamic therefore developed it further as a data collection method. In this way, I used dialogue to ‘illuminate reality’ (Freire 1987:13) and notably it also allowed for a process of checking understanding in process (Miller *et al* 2008).

I use the term ‘dyadic dialogical interviews’ to name this approach. Much as Miller *et al* (2008:119) talk of their individual ‘dialogic model of interview process’ as an interactive experience that allows for participants’ own perspectives to flow freely without the imposed limitations of intrusive probing, by using dyadic dialogical interviewing I was actively focussed on ‘giving voice to the respondents’ interpretations and meanings of the world’.

I designed dyadic dialogical interviews to create an environment that would allow the dialogue to flow in as genuine and uninterrupted a manner as possible between the two participants. In this way, the aim was for the meaning of their community development practice to be co-created as their words together illuminate their practice. In this way, being engaged together in a process of making meaning (Shor 1987) can result in a depth of data. The potential for dialogue to facilitate mutuality was therefore important and the possibility of creating a process in which ‘dialogue is itself creative and re-creative’ (Freire 1987:3) was of central consideration to the design of the dyadic dialogical interview process. Consequently, interviews were designed to allow me to hear what the practitioners had to say, for them to hear each other, and also to create space for what they might create together in dialogue with each other, since each pair of participants was very familiar with each other’s work.

Although the dialogue was predominantly between the pairs of participants, I was active in the process and a crucial role for me as the researcher was in allowing this unfolding process the space it required, being engaged whilst avoiding being intrusive and directive. The freedom to follow the dialogue whilst holding a critical eye was important; I only intervened when I deemed it necessary, using my judgement as researcher familiar with the research framework. My participation involved an ongoing process of reflecting my understandings to acknowledge what participants said, as well as offering inviting, open ended questions when I deemed it relevant. There was a sense of using dialogue between two participants to try to create a situation where each could both validate and question the

other along with my reflections and questions. In this way a complex dynamic interview process was created.

Indeed, the dialogue between two participants created a vivid picture but it also allowed for the participants to validate each other's comments in process, thus adding to the trustworthiness of the data. This also created possibilities for me, and the participants, to actively check out meanings in process.

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) warn of ignoring the asymmetrical power dynamics in qualitative interviewing where the researcher decides on the nature of the study, asks the questions, starts and stops the interviews and dominates the analysis. With foregrounding participants' voices as the aim of this inquiry, this dynamic required constant scrutiny. Frisby, Maguire & Reid (2009) highlight the role of a feminist analysis in noticing power dynamics that may otherwise be missed, and particularly in opening up methodological approaches that challenge the 'researcher as expert, participant as 'other'', dynamic. I engaged this throughout and with Freire (1987) describing dialogue as a power sharing exercise, this combination offered a critical lens and level of balance for the data collection and analysis.

It was notable that often in the dialogues the participants started without waiting for me, they engaged in questioning each other, they regularly affirmed each other's perspectives and they also questioned me. Equally, I engaged with them, I chose when to take part and I was also invited in. Interestingly, there were indeed instances in the dialogue where my input was not picked up on, even ignored, suggesting there was not necessarily a dynamic in which as researcher I had all the power and control. During lengthy dialogues, the transcriptions sometimes reveal my input as clumsy, but the power of dialogue resulted in it rightly being

ignored. In line with the democratisation of research, as mentioned above, this was an important aspect of the process.

Overall, Freeman's (2011:547) words are useful in describing dialogical interviewing as being characterised by having 'no goal in mind in regard to an answer for the topic' and this is important. In dyadic dialogical interviewing there is no hypothesis and there is no specific expectation other than seeing what the exciting unpredictability of dialogue can create.

Selecting the participants

Byrne (2014) points to the versatile nature of selecting participants for qualitative researcher, suggesting formulaic approaches are unlikely either to be found or to be appropriate. Nonetheless Miles *et al* (2014:31) suggest qualitative inquiry usually involves '*small* samples of people, nested in their context and studied in depth' and that 'samples tend to be *purposive* rather than random' (their emphasis). They are not alone, indeed it is common for qualitative research to be described as characterised by purposive sampling, much as Flick (2015:11) states that 'qualitative researchers select participants purposively and integrate small numbers of cases according to their relevance'. What is more, Denscombe (2007) contends that carefully selecting participants purposively based on their pre-existing knowledge is especially useful in qualitative inquiry, particularly where the research is foregrounding participants' experiences, as in this inquiry. By definition, this requires the researcher to have a level of existing knowledge of the participants.

Notably, as Flick (2015) contends, purposive sampling is also common strategy in quantitative inquiries with the sample being a 'minimized representation of the [defined] population'. Accordingly, Thomas and James (2006) criticise the use of terms such as

'purposive sampling' for qualitative researchers suggesting they constitute a misleading and unnecessary mirroring of the experimentalists' positivist research tradition. Their point is an important one and worth reflecting as they highlight the danger of an erroneous inference that the 'sample is in some way reflective of the whole' (Thomas 2013:137). For this inquiry the participants were purposively targeted because 'the logic of the research' (Punch 2009:359) required me to have some pre-existing knowledge of them, not to be a representative sample of a whole. Miles *et al* (2014:33) state that in qualitative inquiry the participant selection is therefore often 'theoretically driven…driven by a conceptual question, not by a concern for representativeness'. In a similar vein, Kumar (2014:228) explains:

> In qualitative research, a number of considerations may influence the selection of a sample, such as: the ease in accessing the potential respondents; your judgement that the person has extensive knowledge about an episode, event or situation of interest; how typical the case is of a category of individuals; or simply that it is totally different from the others'

I did indeed select a small number of participants and they were chosen in different ways within the bounds of the research framework and as Miles *et al* (2014:34) suggest the choice was made 'on conceptual grounds'. Put simply, in order to utilise dialogical interviewing to gain perspectives on community development practice, the participants had to be working in community development, working together, and prepared to engage in dialogue with one another to articulate their practice. Perhaps more relevant is that through using my lens as a community work academic, as well as my lengthy experience as a community development worker, I proactively selected participants based on some knowledge of their approach as worth investigating, in line with insider status (Patton 2002). As Kumar (2014) maintains this was based on my judgement that their expertise on community development practice provided a potentially rich avenue of inquiry for my study. In this way participants were not

randomly selected nor were they selected or rejected against finite criteria, as is common in quantitative approaches to purposive sampling (Flick 2015). Rather the participants were intentionally targeted and much as Denscombe (2007:17) contends in this way 'the advantage of purposive sampling is that it allows the researcher to home in on people or events which there are good grounds for believing will be critical to the research'. I pro-actively 'homed in' on participants because of their perceived expertise.

The process of selection was involved and notably there was a mixed approach used. I purposively selected both participants in each of three pairings. However, in the fourth pairing I approached one potential participant because of their known expertise and using the snowball technique (Miles *et al* 2014) I asked, 'my way from the first participant to the next' (Flick 2015:104). Mindful that criticisms of targeting participants include the potential pitfall that researchers specifically choose participants to engineer the results they hope for (Koerber & McMichael 2008), my selection was specific to the methodology and area of participant expertise rather than the hope for specific findings. Indeed, my purposive targeting of participants because of some knowledge of them was a strength for this inquiry because it allowed me direct access to a potential 'richness of data' (Koerber & McMichael 2008:463).

Evidently, it follows that the eight participants were known to me, though not well, and all were involved in community development practice in Scotland with varying lengths of experience from relatively recent to around thirty years of practice. Six of the participants were women and two were men and other than that information about protected characteristics was not specifically collected. At the time this was considered potentially unnecessarily obtrusive, however it may be a methodological limitation and is revisited in the final chapter. Although they all currently worked in Scotland it became clear that some had community development experience from outwith Scotland at different points in their careers

and their breadth of experience added a level of global perspectives. A summary of available general contextual information about the participants is detailed in Table 1:

Participants' Contextual Information (available): **Table 2**			
Participant	Gender	Experience (estimate in years)	Context
S	F	16	voluntary sector organisation working with young people
E	M	21	
N	F	30	project working with women that was part of a national network
R	F	2	
T	M	25	urban Local Authority setting
LA	F	25	
L	F	20	voluntary sector organisation with a focus on housing
U	F	15	
Participants worked in Dundee or Edinburgh or Glasgow and/or nationally.			

Two participants were employed in a voluntary sector organisation with a focus on housing, two in an urban Local Authority setting, two in a specific project working with women that was part of a national network, and two in a voluntary sector organisation working with young people. Whilst their settings are important to the ensuing analysis, the participants were not chosen because of the focus of the organisation they worked for. Rather they were selected for the way they talked about their roles and their practice and how that sparked my interest in whether they may have important perspectives on community development practice to share, much as Kumar (2014) suggests. In other words, they were selected for their expertise in community development, and my recognition of that. Notably, the different settings of practice across Scotland allowed for different perspectives to be revealed and this forms part of the data analysis.

Miles *et al* (2014:32) point to the wide range of strategies for selecting participants suggesting this can be tightly planned in advance or evolve depending on the 'unique conditions within each project'. The interviews were undertaken over an extended period between late 2015 and early 2019, essentially to allow the dialogical interview approach to

be developed, but also to allow for an evolving approach to the recruitment of participants and to allow for the participant verification process to take place. As Miles *et al* (2014) suggest the process of participant selection was an evolving process throughout the inquiry.

Chronologically, the first two participants I interviewed were people whose work I was relatively familiar with, it was my engagement with them that helped develop my approach to data collection and that confirmed the dyadic dialogical interviews as a research method. There was undoubtedly an element of 'ease in accessing' these participants (Kumar 2014:228) with elements of 'convenience sampling' (Henn *et al* 2009:157) alongside my purposive judgement that they had specific expertise, as is common in qualitative inquiry (Thomas 2014; Denscombe 2007). One woman, one man, they worked together in the same organisation and both had lengthy careers in community work with young people. The second pairing was between two women who had come together to work on a specific project with women, one of them had a lengthy career as a community worker and the other was relatively new to community development work. I became introduced to their work through my networking as an academic and once again my judgement that they had specific community development expertise worth investigating (Kumar 2014) came into play with a mirroring of the process with the first participants. They were duly purposively selected for their community development work. Similarly, the third pairing was between two women who had worked together for more than ten years in community development and housing, both very experienced community development practitioners. My introduction to their work through a conference resulted in me purposively selecting them for their community development expertise. The final pairing was two community workers employed by a local authority in a city setting, one female and one male, both of whom had lengthy experience of working in specific geographical areas of a Scottish city. Their selection was somewhat different from the rest of the participants with a combination of purposive selection combined with the snowball technique. Familiar with one participant's work and assured that his

perspective was one of expertise and worthy of investigation I approached him with a request for participation in my research. Willing to participate he also suggested his colleague as second participant.

The evolving nature of participant selection was an important part of the research and much as Thomas (2013:19) contends this iterative process is common in qualitative inquiries and means that it is unnecessary ‘to specify exactly and definitively your course of action at the beginning of your project’.

The interview processes and data analysis

Participants were interviewed in their community organisations or in a place of their choice. I initially introduced them to my inquiry either by email or in person and invited them to dialogue with one another and me as researcher, on their perspectives on the nature of their practice. I then followed that up by email communication giving them a participant information sheet and consent sheet so they could consider their involvement further and to let me know (See Appendix 2). I took care to provide them with information on the study, consent forms, confidentiality agreements, and importantly, opportunities to question or clarify with space to make considered decisions. This was particularly important ethically since the participants were known to me and it allowed them space to consider their involvement, accept, or refuse, to engage. They knew they could withdraw from the process at any point and the nature of the interviews allowed for a revisiting of ethical consent and confidentiality as we went along. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Dundee School of Education and Social Work Ethics Committee.

The dyadic dialogical interviews involved in-depth, lengthy dialogue between each of the pairs of community workers and the open-ended dialogue began with me asking them to tell me about their approach to their work. The dialogue was open and therefore had a natural flow, each dyad engaged in the lengthy dialogue, participants asked me and each other spontaneous questions, I reflected back their comments, they reflected comments back to each other, I checked meanings and asked occasional questions, participants checked meanings with each other and also significantly reflected on their practice in situ, and created meanings. The result was a depth of data that presents a complex picture of their practice. The interviews were audio recorded and I also took minimal hand-written notes. Each dialogue lasted between two and four hours long.

Discussing validity in qualitative research, Creswell & Miller (2000) suggest that collaboration with participants is a way of demonstrating credibility. Collaboration varies and can be anything on the continuum from participants as co-researchers to participants' involvement in the design of questions or in the analysis of data (McNiff & Whitehead 2011). Influenced by a critical paradigm, this study encouraged the active involvement of participants and their critical thinking alongside mine through dialogue but also through member-checking or participant verification (Creswell & Miller 2000). I checked the data and my interpretation and analysis of it with the participants in three stages that are elucidated below:

Participant Verification Process		**Table 3**
Interview 1	Interview 2	Participants' Voices Chapter
Dialogue with participants on their practice – dialogue allowing for checking out in process regularly throughout the interview and at the end as a summing up.	Dialogue used to engage participants in a participant verification process – I presented my thematic analysis of the data and participants engaged in dialogue to comment on the accuracy of my representation and interpretation. Full	Once the participants' voices section was written up participants were invited to read their section and comment.

	transcripts and notes available.	

Miller *et al* (2008:119) point to the use of participant verification as a tool for demonstrating trustworthiness in qualitative research; Lincoln & Guba (1985) concur but describe it as member-checking. It is commonly understood as the practice of taking the data back to participants for their approval of the accuracy of representation and interpretation. It is therefore generally considered a valid measure of trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Miller 2000; Miller *et al* 2008). Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest its use allows for a process where participants can confirm or challenge interpretations and revisit, expand or change their comments.

However, Harvey (2014:26) laments this as an unsatisfactory linear process that often results in participants simply agreeing with the researcher's interpretations. Uncomfortable with this as research practice that does not quite go far enough, Harvey (2014:34) looked to embrace a way of working with participants using dialogue that engaged with them as 'responsible, thinking agents' who could 'theorize their own experience'. Drawing on Harvey's approach I found that dialogue enabled an ongoing participant verification process in this inquiry. In this way, both the first and second interviews, were grounded in a participant verification process as I checked out meanings in process however the second interviews were more fully grounded in the verification process.

Consequently, the second interviews were somewhat different from the first with me taking up a more active role as I actively presented my thoughts and analysis to the participants. We met, the full transcripts available, and I presented the thematic analysis, so far. Interestingly, some of Harvey's (2014) criticisms came true, whereby the participants agreed with much of what I presented to them; however, it was not a simple process of nodding in

agreement. Although the general themes were often agreed, I found us entering a fascinating process of meaning making once again. There was dialogue, questioning, suggestions for change and new points made that I dully captured either through recording or handwritten notes.

Notably, there were some disagreements with some of my wording of themes, which is indicative of the power of dialogue as research method. This second stage dialogue allowed for the participants to see my thematic analysis, consider it and accept it, or indeed reject it as a flawed depiction of their practice, should they choose to. This was dialogical member-checking in action and indicative of a collaborative, ethical meaning making process at play (Harvey 2014). There was depth of dialogue and occasions when changes were needed, perspectives shared and altered wording agreed.

It is important to note that whilst the intention was to engage in second stage dyadic dialogical interviews with each pair of participants, the reality was that this process of participant verification happened in different ways. Three of the dyads engaged with me in stage two dialogues, however the participants in one of the dyads were unable to do this because of time commitments and changes to their work roles. I tried numerous times by email to arrange a suitable time to meet with them but to no avail. The pressures on their time meant it was not possible to meet. Whilst this was not my ideal, the dynamic nature of the first stage dialogue meant that it was not disastrous to omit the second stage process. More importantly, ethically I had to accept their non-availability and not push them for further involvement. I did however subsequently offer up their participants' voices section of my thesis for their information and this was accepted, but with no feedback given. There were also some expressed concerns about confidentiality by some participants with interest in how their dialogue was being portrayed. My response to that was again to make the

participants' voices section available to those who wanted to read it for scrutiny. I embraced the minor points for change that were subsequently fed back to me.

Sinha and Back's words are useful here in describing how they, and I:

> grappled with a means to develop a way of listening and talking that recognised that there were limits to the insight of both researchers and participants and tried to play them off against one another to see what each insight could bring when brought together in dialogue (Sinha & Back 2014:482).

The interview processes were therefore integral to the data analysis. As with the approaches to data gathering, data analysis in qualitative inquiry can be undertaken in different ways (Punch 2005). Grix (2002) reminds us that method alone is not a measure of good scholarship and that robust analysis, cross-checks and collation of the data are central concerns to research. Accordingly, an important part of undertaking qualitative research that is methodologically and ethically sound, involves being explicit about the data analysis process, something that Braun & Clark (2008) argue can often be given short shrift and consequently weaken research.

Whilst it was clear to me that drawing out themes from the data would be a useful strategy in order to undertake an illuminative analysis of the dialogues and create insights into the meanings (Thomas 2013), how to do this was a crucial consideration. Braun & Clarke (2008) are critical of researchers who claim that themes simply appear in the data (Rubin & Rubin 1995). They suggest that such a passive account of what can only be described as a dynamic, active research process is flawed and belies the methodological grounding that is required to underpin the process of exposing, revealing, uncovering and interpreting the data. Thematic data analysis, they continue, is a specific research method and a flexible,

theoretical, methodologically robust way of uncovering themes in data and it was well suited to the dialogical data.

Moreover, the flexibility of this as a method allows for an iterative approach, which was an important consideration for this research. Utilising thematic analysis enabled me to analyse each dialogical interview as and when they were undertaken. Revealing themes in the dialogues created a picture of practice that at once stood alone but that subsequently acted as a catalyst for my ongoing inquiry, the selection of further participants and a cross-dialogue approach to meaning making.

With much made of the benefits of software for thematic data analysis, it is worth acknowledging that I considered it. Miles *et al* (2014) espouse the benefits of NVivo for inquiries that foreground participants' voices. Thomas (2013) notes that software can be particularly useful when there are large amounts of qualitative data. My lengthy dialogical data made the use of software a credible possibility, however, I found myself uneasy with handing over the data to the computer to analyse. Concurring with Thomas' (2013:244) reflections that 'nothing, of course, substitutes for your intelligent reading of your data' and that 'there's no substitute for a good set of highlighters…a pen and paper, and a brain', I rejected the use of software for this inquiry. Further, as Miles *et al* (2014:99) suggest 'coding triggers analytic thought' and I concluded that the nature of my inquiry meant I needed to have the data in my hands, with pens for coding, and my engaged analytical attention throughout.

I undertook thematic data analysis using the so-called kitchen table technique of coding with pens and highlighters (Garasia, Begum-Ali & Farthing 2015). Whilst this enabled me to collect the data and follow a process to interrogate, code and reduce it to themes, it also

notably allowed me the freedom to think about the data analysis throughout. Miles *et al* (2014) contend that data analysis undertaken as a concurrent process along with data collection allows for a dynamic process of thinking about it in relation to the development of the overall strategy of data generation; in this way, gaps can be revealed and responded to as the research develops.

The dyadic dialogical interview process created an environment in which the analysis was indeed ongoing. By that I mean that the participants deliberated and stressed the meanings of what they said and highlighted the important aspects of it with each other and me, as an ongoing part of the process. Much analysis was therefore undertaken as an ongoing part of the inquiry rather than all at the end once all the data was gathered. Additionally, my central role as researcher meant that I was there all along with a listening, noticing, critical approach saturated in the data and picking up on the themes through handwritten notes. These notes acted as an early revealing of the themes. The analysis was an iterative process in itself. It was influenced by what was being revealed during the participants' dialogues and it was undertaken in a multi-staged process. The dialogue from each dyad of participants was analysed separately.

There was never any question for me about producing a full and detailed transcription of the dialogical interviews. Bird (2005) invites us to see transcription as a necessary, central part of analysis and Braun and Clarke (2006) dictate that verbal data must be turned into written format for a thematic analysis to be undertaken. I found that my immersion in the data was crucial and that the process of transcription offered a way into that.

Thematic analysis as an active, searching, interpretive process (Braun & Clark 2006) meant that repeated readings of the transcriptions were required. My initial reading, writing, and re-

reading of the first stage transcripts uncovered tentative themes, I colour coded and connected the themes and although this initially seemed like a rather crude process, it was a key stage in the analysis. Creswell (1994) emphasises that numerous readings of the entire data set are crucial to rigorous analysis and a key part of the process of defining the patterned responses. My immersion in the transcription process, listening again and again to the recordings, followed by numerous readings of the lengthy transcriptions allowed me to bury myself in the data in a way that enabled me to establish a strong relationship with it. I could hear the participants voices as I read the transcript over and again, their words, their perspectives.

I created first stage themes in a list format for each dyad, developed from the colour coding of the transcriptions. Braun and Clarke (2006) stress the active role of the researcher in judging what the themes are and how key they are. They emphasise that there are no hard and fast rules or formulae in thematic data analysis, rather the centrality of the themes in relation to capturing aspects of the research question. I developed the themes from within the dialogue to portray, as closely as possible, the perspectives of the participants. The first crude iteration of the themes amounted to between nine and twelve key categories with sub-categories. At this stage, I undertook the analysis alone, listening, interpreting, and finding ways of theming the data, notably by building on what was emphasised in the dialogue and in my written notes. The initial list was too long, overly simplistic; there were clear connections and articulations throughout that were crucial to the presentation of the participants' work and so I needed to find a way of representing the complexity and connections. The dynamic process at play, represented through dialogue, deserved a dynamic representation. I scrutinised further, I further coded, I articulated comments and themes and I then reviewed and reduced them once again to four or five key themes for each dialogue but importantly using lengthy parts of the dialogue as illustration. This way the dialogues reveal the themes rather than fitting into them and this is important.

Literature as triangulation is considered to bring a certain level of credibility (Creswell 2003) and in much the same way as Paulis *et al* (2010:852) say that 'voices from the literature' strengthened their resolve and assured them of the viability of their inquiry, I used literature as 'outside authority' alongside the authority of the participants' voices. Literature on the use of dialogue as research methods was central to the design of the study and to the consideration of its use as research method. Literature on community development was also central in that the dilemmas and theoretical debates around practice were key to the research question, and the values and principles were key to the research design. The analysis of patterns and themes involved further steeping in literature. Dialogue was used to produce empirical materials, literature for stage one analysis, dialogue for stage two analysis, and literature again as final stage analysis.

This iterative process and the dynamic nature of dialogue means that the analysis could go on and on; literature was used finally to create the narrative and in effect to respond to and dialogue with, the participants' voices. In order to stay true to what they were raising I drew on a range of different literature that allowed me to respond to their thoughts. This way the dialogue and my analysis using literature combined to create a trustworthy picture.

The participants' perspectives are presented in chapter 3 and each dialogue with my analysis is presented separately. Thereafter, chapter 4 presents concluding thoughts based on a cross analysis of the messages from the dialogues and my reflective analysis of the research process and design of the methodology.

CHAPTER 3 - Participants' Voices

Synopsis: The presentation of the data as sections of dialogue interspersed with my analysis reveals a picture of each dyad's perspectives on their practice. The four dialogues are presented separately with a narrative that builds through them.

Introduction to participants' voices

In this chapter, the dialogues are presented using the participants' voices, quoting them directly in order to remain as true as possible to their narratives and to how they represented their experiences in dialogue with each other. My analysis bounces off their words and by using relevant literature as 'outside authority' alongside the authority of their voiced practice experiences, I demonstrate what the dialogues sparked in my thinking and present their words in dialogue with my analysis. In this way, I present the data under the themes, as sections of dialogue interspersed with my analysis in response to what is being said and a picture of each dialogue with its key thematic messages is revealed. The themes are drawn from the dialogue using the participants' voices and, although not exclusively, they tend to follow the order of each dialogue and emerge as part of the ongoing narrative.

It was notable that the participants quickly engaged with each other in dialogue, not just with me, and that this was indeed the predominant nature of each dialogue. Granted, I did have an active role with them, as will become apparent from the selections of dialogue below, but it was the meaning-making between the participants that was the prominent discourse.

In presenting and discussing the dialogues, I have anonymised the participants by using coded letters rather than names to give due attention to ethics and confidentiality. I have been explicit about the gender profile of the participants simply through pronouns, but no other revealing characteristics have been used. In each of the dialogues, I refer to the people I interviewed as 'the participants', whilst the references to the people they work with in communities vary and includes women, young people, community members, local people, as is relevant to their dialogues. In this I am led by them.

hooks' words on voice and representation go some way to illustrating the importance of the dialogues being represented in their true form, avoiding a process of writing the participants' perspectives anew and laying claim to them. She highlights some of the dilemmas, challenges, and central premises of this research:

> No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice…I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. (hooks, 1989: 22).

With hooks words as leveller, the design of this research involves entering the space of the participants with respect for their expertise, their knowing and their voice. My methodological and ethical approach has enabled a process in which the participants reveal their practice in its strengths, limitations, hopes and challenges. My approach is therefore to engage in dialogue with their perspectives, the analysis developed through my thoughts in response to their words, and together an authentic picture is created.

This chapter is in four parts with each dyads' dialogues presented and analysed separately. They therefore standalone, however my narrative weaves through and connects them. They are presented in the following order:

- Dialogue 1: It's About Accountability - the participants discuss their roles in community development and housing across a Scottish city.
- Dialogue 2: Contradictory Space – the participants discuss their work based in geographical communities in a Scottish city.

- Dialogue 3: Justice and Journey – the participants discuss their work focussed on building community with young people in a Scottish city.
- Dialogue 4: Bringing Realities to the Fore – the participants discuss their project-based work with women involved in prostitution.

This is not the chronological order of the interviews. As I engaged in analysis of the data and my narrative emerged, it became clear that the above order unfolds a story of community development practice that is engaging.

DIALOGUE 1 - It's about accountability

The participants in this dialogue were involved in community development and housing, employed by a voluntary sector organisation funded in part by a local authority. Their dialogue illustrates the role of community development as a process that strives for accountability. Using a rights-based approach as a tool for driving community development activity, the participants discuss their community work and how it manifests in relationship with each other, with people in communities and with local, national, and international agencies. Their relentless commitment to being led by the lived experiences of people in communities, to engaging with a process of education that is explicitly grounded in theory, and to challenging social inequalities by holding power holders to account, shines through their relaxed, passionate and hopeful dialogue that at times reveals a bold practice that has unduly impacted untowardly on their own health and well-being.

Broadly, the themes that are apparent in this dialogue are:

- In the hands of the community
- Relationships
- Explicit theoretical basis
- Influence, accountability and rights-based
- Power, pressure & collective resilience

The themes are presented in order as detailed above and, although not exclusively, this is to follow the participants' narrative as much as possible. The themes are equally weighted, in other words the order is not based on importance first, and their story unfolds with my analysis building throughout.

In the hands of the community

The participants opened with one of the clear recurring themes evident throughout this dialogue: 'in the hands of the community' and it was revisited in different places throughout:

U – So shall I just start us off?

J – Yeah, do, so it is just really about your perspectives on your work, how you work together and how you would define your perspectives on community development, really?

U – Yeah, I think we do like to be upfront with folk don't we [to L]? Definitely put it into the hands of the community. You know we always work with them to hear what they [think], what are their issues...we're always using the wider community development approach to, you know, to get things done.

On one level this is a straightforward statement for those involved in community work; however, it is open to interpretation because of potentially nebulous or contested meanings of community. Brent (2009:205) usefully suggests community is defined broadly in three ways: '*as an illusion…an organic social form…as place'* and he goes on to state that it has different meanings to those using it and that its meaning is usually as defined by the orator, thus feeding the contestations. Whilst the limitations of a sole analysis of community as place have rightly been highlighted in the literature (Emejulu 2011; Tett 2006; Petrie 1996) and in chapter 1, there remain significant arguments for community of place as a:

> site in which the contradictions of policy are exposed [with] opportunities for connecting the local with the broader context…and the personal is political (Cooke & Shaw 1996:2-3).

This framing is evident in the dialogue and the participants present a hopeful counter narrative to community as illusion and their meaning tends to move between community of place and community as organic social form, or communities of interest or identity (Gilchrist 2007).

Working with people in geographical communities the participants regularly refer to community as place. However, their focus on working alongside people who are mixed tenure housing tenants means that communities of interest, are also evident particularly as the community development process facilitates a speaking out, and speaking together, of the shared struggles of living in sub-standard conditions. In this way, there is also a sense of community as dialogue and relationship building, much as Westoby and Dowling (2013) espouse.

L – …E was talking about having to throw out her clothes every 6 months coz they had to be kept in plastic boxes otherwise the mould will eat them. These are people who have got the least money in society, have got the most difficulties in society and the system is making it even harder for them by blaming them for having mould.

U – Yeah

L – Okay 'because you shouldn't hang up your washing and you are causing condensation', well no it's mould!

U – Because your clothes are in plastic boxes…So that was in [area of the city] and then in [another area of the city] there was loads of tenants who said: 'well we've got damp in our houses as well'…but it's like nobody's really tackling things well enough out there if things are still happening.

Both participants regularly discuss their roles alongside people in communities in striving to find out the issues that are relevant to them and importantly this comes with their framing of the struggles as structural inequalities rather than individual weaknesses (Lister 2004), combined with a sense of deep caring about people's circumstances. The structural analysis comes with a will to find ways to work together towards change that is led by the expressed needs of the community members. Whilst the theme is described as 'in the hands of the community', it is clear from the dialogue that the participants are actively involved as part of that in a mutual process.

U – Last year I worked with a group of sheltered housing tenants to bring using a rights-based approach to make service improvements from the [local authority]. So, we did the same process, the action research worked coz we already had an established group. So, we worked with them to find out 'what are the similar themes that are coming from your areas?' so we could focus on and develop the survey. And they all went out and did the training with them to go door knocking and stuff like that. We got a fantastic response…

J – So what was the process?

L – So we did leaflet drops and posters for open meetings to identify themes for the action research…the community made questions based on the themes and then workers and community [members] went door knocking, then we did the training in rights-based framing, looked at indicators in relation to it, set indicators and wrote the report, then had accountability meetings.

This notion of the approach being 'in the hands of the community' is revisited particularly by U on many occasions during the dialogue. She highlights her role as being alongside community members taking a back seat whilst actively striving to highlight the issues being

raised. This includes supporting community members in their learning processes, and particularly in knowing their rights with a view to influencing powerholders and holding them to account. The emphasis on learning and development in communities reveals practice that is driven by the need to build learning relationships for social change founded on a profound depth of knowing that 'knowledge creation is something we can, and should, all engage in' (Seal 2014:21).

From striving to connect with people in communities using door knocking to build relationships and find out people's lived experiences and expressed concerns, to using their own experience and intellect to draw on resources and approaches that connect with people 'where they are at' in a mutual learning process, U consistently refers to the role of the community worker as ally, catalyst and educator working to 'put things into the hands of the community':

U – *I would obviously just pull whatever tools there are to fit with where the community is at the moment and try whatever fits them best …I talk about 'shit-stirring', it's not, it is in a way, but it's giving people the chance to challenge: 'Actually you shouldn't have to sit there and be told this is what's going to happen in your community. No, they dinnae live there, this is <u>your</u> community and if you dinnae like that then you should be able to challenge that and stand up and say 'well, nut!'.*

The regular references to working with people to use democratic process to influence practice, and service provision, reflect a process of learning that is about moving forwards, there is no sense of a learning process designed to encourage an acceptance of the status quo (Ledwith 2020; Mayo 2017). Consequently, there is a strong sense of the role of the community development worker as facilitator giving, creating, and responding to

opportunities and this is illustrated in one way by working with people to utilise the democratic political processes available:

U – *I was to go up with a group to do a deputation to the Council….*

L – *…when there's an injustice there has to be a speaking out about it!*

Alongside using that formal political process and striving to make democratic processes more readily accessible to (in order to be influenced by) people in communities, the participants describe action in different ways that strives to raise awareness of injustices that are the underpinning drivers, or determinants, of people's lived experiences. This is illustrative of community development practice influenced by Freirean perspectives, as Bhattacharyya (2009:21) highlights, in which people are respected as agents of change and together there is a striving for a shifting of political process towards a:

> truly democratic politics – non-imposed, non-manipulative, and respectful [of the] will of the people.

Whilst this is the intention, the hope of the practice expressed, there is no sense of this being a naïve perspective. Moreover, the dialogue reveals the very real challenges inherent to the work the participants are involved in as they strive to influence actions towards positive social change. These challenges manifest in different ways and not least in the dynamics between community members:

U – Some people are very stuck in their ways and don't want to see change and that's really difficult because, I mean there's a group that I've worked with [explanation of where] and

there's two members in the group that have been there for a long time. And then the new group got started and they decided to join three groups into one and em, I always find it really difficult to attend meetings with them because: 'been there, done that, oh that's not going to work' and that negative view and it rubs off and rubs off on people. I mean, I would sit and speak up in meetings and say: 'well do you know what, there's different people living here now, what do you think about that?' You know…

L – 'Whit's the point?'

U – Yeah, 'what's the point?'…I always found that really, really difficult.

The discomfort, almost frustration, expressed by U about the perceived negativity amongst community members active in the committees highlights one of the enduring challenges to community development practice situated around those whose voice is heard. Her approach in challenging and actively encouraging awareness of differing needs and different communities of people is important. What she is articulating is reminiscent of the integrity required in acting for the wider community when noticing that powerful community voices may be acting for the status quo. Younghusband (1968:83-84) highlights the 'acute tensions of loyalty' that community workers can feel in working out when the needs of 'some less powerful group with pressing problems should be given priority and actively supported'. The role is active and U's description of this process as 'putting it into the hands of the community' is far from simple.

Relationships

The importance of building relationships to the process of education, knowing, understanding, and taking action is clearly highlighted in numerous places throughout the dialogue.

L – I think what has always impressed me about U is that she is an incredible people person and that, like, [to U] you're really able to connect with people where they're at and that's the basis of really very strong relationships and really strong trust and I think that's, like if I'm reflecting to you, that's where I see your practice starting from. It's that really deep powerful connections with people that enables you to do amazing stuff wi them. And you know we could never have got away with the housing rights work that we've done without you leading that.

U – Yeah.

L - We could never have got away with that whole shift and change of ideology and practice if we had not had that strength as a starting point.

J – So always grounded in the relationships first?

L – I think definitely, definitely.

The dialogue reveals the importance of relationship building as a catalyst for participation, engagement, action and for developing trust-building contact with diverse communities. Whilst highlighting the need for productive relationships with people in communities, the participants are also notably revealing a trusting, respectful relationship between themselves. Shevellar and Barringham (2016:72) highlight the collocation of these relationships in community development based on 'shared humanity and empathy'. The participants highlight the deliberate relationship building through continued effort, engagement, reaching out, knocking on doors:

L - And this participative model of getting the Somali community involved and getting the Polish community involved and getting really anybody involved that wanted to send in

pictures...[and] people with really severe mental health, who would never get involved in anything, getting involved.

U – Yeah.

J – How did you do that?

L – Relationships.

U – Chatting, we went to every door when we were doing the surveys and we would keep going out and if people had really severe issues then we would keep on at them to say 'have you reported this? Do you want us to do it for you?' You know, to say: 'we are not working for the Council but we can help you', but a lot of the time the relationship between the Council and the tenants had just been so strained that people just didn't want to engage at all. You know they were just going to put up or they were waiting for the [house] move to happen. But yeah, it was the relationships.

J – So constantly building it, constantly revisiting it?

U – Yeah and having a well-kent face in the area you know coz going in as a worker you don't know anybody but having somebody who has lived there for numerous years. So, our champion that we had, our community champion, she knew a lot of people and she was friendly, she had a dog and so she was always out chatting to folk anyway. So, having that, you know, was amazing.

L – And she understood community development.

U – Yes.

L - And she learned about the human rights-based approach and is able to talk about it. So, the theory, she gets [it]; so she understands every single stage of the process.

U – Yep.

J – Did she already or was it through the relationship that she got that?

L – No, it was through the project that she learned that.

J – So through being explicit about that, like you said earlier, that then developed? So, her role was crucial to…?

U – Absolutely, we couldn't have done it without her, I don't think.

L – Yeah absolutely and she'll be the one that's leading it in Scotland going forward.

U – Yeah, without a doubt. And she's been great coming, we never ever felt comfortable if we were asked to go and do a presentation or a training or something somewhere, without having her there, cos she was so…

L – She could speak about it, we could chat about the theory stuff, but it was her that had the lived experience.

U – Yeah, [she] could talk about the process from her point of view what gives the work value and what it's all about really, you know.

Clearly demonstrating respect for community members, the participants acknowledge the limitations of the workers' role whilst highlighting the importance of a community champion who has engaged in learning about community development processes, engages other community members in learning about community development and encourages participation, awareness-raising and collective action. Evidently, this is illustrative of an approach that is designed to understand the key experiences of people living in mixed tenure housing in a particular geographical area whilst importantly acknowledging that there are different communities and differing interests and experiences to be heard and acted upon.

Specific effort is made to engage with diverse communities, and this is revealing of practice that is not delimited to definitions of community as place. Connecting with people from Somali communities and from Polish communities, as well as challenging community

members' awareness of diversity, challenges notions of community as homogeneous. Further, connecting with people whose engagement has been limited by marginalisation and mental health challenges builds a picture of an awareness of the complexity of communities and processes of 'starting from people's interests in common while respecting their continuing attachments elsewhere' (Mayo 2017:168).

The sense in the dialogue of 'keeping at it' comes from a place of caring about the situation people are in and an understanding of structural inequalities and of the isolation that so often comes with that (Hoggett *et al* 2009). The relationship building the participants refer to is a complex process and the willingness to engage in, and with, the communities by door knocking again and again illustrates an intention for continual engagement to find out what issues are important for people. This is an intention to move beyond a simple process of participation, consultation or indeed endorsing of decisions to what Bhattacharyya (2009:23) describes as a process of working alongside people in communities in 'deciding the agenda for debate and decision…defining the problems to be solved and how to solve them'. This is complex work with complex intention, and it is certainly not too big a jump to suggest that 'it's about the relationships' belies a development process that is grounded in the complex context and set of intentions Bhattacharyya describes.

The door knocking, the refusal to give up, the revisiting, the chatting, and the relationship building all point to practice that is grounded in an understanding of what Ledwith (2016:21) suggests is one of the challenges of community development work 'to find ways through the hopelessness that oppression usually brings', and the participants are revealing a picture of practice that is determined to do so.

Reminiscent of what Bourdieu (1999) frames as the processes of 'social suffering' that come with poverty and marginalisation, the participants reveal an understanding of the potentially hidden nature of that suffering. The door knocking and revisiting of people alongside the engagement with the 'well-kent face' are illustrative of a committed effort to notice, see, hear, and respectfully understand the nature of the social suffering. This is in order to engage with people who are living in sub-standard situations and find ways together to challenge the status quo as a political process rather than to give up, 'put up' or wait for a house move.

Emejulu (2011) reminds us to be wary of practice that assumes communities are passively waiting for community development interventions. However, as Ife (2010:16) contends, this approach has at heart 'a respecting and validating [of] the knowledge and expertise in the community itself' and it is a notable values-led thread throughout the dialogue.

Freire's (2016) notion of conscientisation is also apparent here in that the 'well-kent face' is a community member who embraces the learning processes available and through that learns about the rights-based approach, is engaged in educating others and in challenging for social change. Demonstrating respect for the 'well-kent face' as an 'organic intellectual' (Gramsci 1986) and being upfront about how her expertise compliments theirs, the participants point to the pivotal role she plays both in the success of the project and its ongoing developments. This could be interpreted on a very simplistic level; however, the importance of this process of engagement and mutuality is much more readily illustrated in its complexity by Lister's words (2004:174):

> In more transformative understandings, such individual empowerment opens up the potential for collective political/citizenship strategic agency, which in turn can further empower both individuals and groups.

This is community development practice that is grounded in respect for people's agency with a clear understanding that there are daily impacts of poverty, inequality, and marginalisation on people's everyday lives. Alongside that, there is a willingness to build relationships that will deepen that understanding, frame it far beyond an individual failing and suffering, and strive together to engage in action that will broadly influence change for those raising the issues, as well as others.

This is indeed practice that is presented with clarity and that reveals a solid theoretical underpinning and values' base, that frames the activities undertaken involving respect, equity, structural analysis, collective action, learning and conscientisation.

Theoretical basis

It is evident that even when the participants don't name it as such, there is depth to this dialogue that is revealing of a solid theoretically grounded approach. That said, the participants stressed the importance of the theoretical foundations to their work on many occasions, noticeably led predominantly by one of the participants. It was however something both participants engaged with, in different but obvious ways.

In the dialogue above L refers to a *shift in ideology and practice* and later clarifies that this refers to the introduction of a rights-based approach. They both pointed to the need to understand the theories underpinning community development practice, particularly of Freirean thinking, and for this to be driving all aspects of practice. Notably, the need for this to be clearly articulated in relationship with community members was also stressed.

Reflecting threads throughout the literature and concerned by what she suggests is unthinking practice resulting in unthinking ameliorative action, Ledwith (2011) talks of the need for a revisiting of critical practice grounded in theoretical thinking. She goes on to suggest there is a 'gaping chasm between theory and practice' and that it is 'an ongoing weakness for community development' (2016:45). Similarly, Meade *et al* (2016) call for more critique of practice, as noted above. It is interesting to note that the numerous mentions of theory by these participants do not fit the description of such a practice deficit and there is much to learn from that.

Notably however, the participants concur with Ledwith's analysis as they point to limited community development practice that they themselves are witnesses to. What is important here however is that they stress the need to fully understand the theories underpinning community development practice alongside a commitment to that understanding being explicitly shared, and developed, with community members. In this way they espouse the Foucault (1991) inspired perspective of knowledge as power.

L - Yeah, I think there's something about passion as well.

U - Yeah.

L - I've always found when I'm working wi you that we've got quite a similar theoretical basis as well like, I'm dead grounded in Freire… I thought that all community work was like that and then I got the shock of my life when I went into practice… there were egos and there were back stabbing and front stabbing and power relationships which I hadn't experienced during my placement because it was very grounded in Freirean ideology so that shocked me…

J – Can you describe that a wee bit more? What do you mean?

L - I remember when I started working in [a geographical community] that despite me having a Community Education degree…there was almost no recognition of my expertise, or no understanding that I had a particular skill to give. It was almost that CD is so silent in this process and I was used to it being very explicit in terms of doing work with [named community project]. So for me there was a bit of a feeling with local activists in the community that they didn't really understand community development and what it was about so that part of my work was about being explicit in the methods that I was using and why I was using them. And that's always been a feature of my practice.

J - So was that a learning point when you thought 'there's something not right here, I need to make this much more explicit…I need to voice it'…or was that because it was Freire…?

L - It was both really, so for me it didn't sit comfortably that there should be such a power dynamic between practitioners and activists in the community…

J - …how did you make that explicit?

L - I think I'm always conscious about talking about Freire and talking about the theory and talking about, even talking about community development, at local practice level because when you are involved with like wee community groups or tenants groups they don't know the process that's happening. Or I didn't feel that they knew the process, you know they didn't understand it because it is so subtly delivered. You know, you get to a level of expertise that it is almost subtly delivered and it looks like chaos when actually [that's because] there's not an understanding of the theories behind the activities in a community development process. So, I've always found being up front about that and then teaching about that in relation to you know when we do group dynamics stuff…

U - Yeah.

L - …or when we are doing committee skills training and talking about the ladder of participation or you know when you are talking about Maslow's hierarchy of needs and things like that.

U - Yeah.

L - Actually bringing some of that out has been really important, so that people can be co-learners in a process, rather than just being done to, which a lot of community development is.

U - [It] is, yeah and I think that you often find that. And that's what I'm most proud about the work that we do, that you sometimes see other practitioners or the way other things are, you know like, and you think 'are you actually teaching anybody how to be involved in their community?' You know, like, I was always told if you are a good community worker you would always do yourself out of a job because you are educating somebody, you know, to go out and practice it themselves within their communities or run their committees really well, you know. So, it's good, I think, the process that we've had.

There are different aspects of Freire's (2016) thinking evident here, particularly the process of learning together as part of a community and making the learning process explicit, and shared, as a co-learning experience. Much as Frost & Seal (2014: 21) stress that 'knowledge creation is something we all can and should engage in', the inference here is that being explicit about the theoretical underpinnings is a potential catalyst for further learning for all involved and that this is an important part of the process. This therefore points to attempts to work from a place of striving to readdress power dynamics.

In other words, if community development process is undertaken from a powerful standpoint, keeping people in communities ignorant of the theories and processes at play, then the danger of creating an education process that simply feeds neoliberal discourse and limits learning and development (Giroux 2011; Hoggett *et al* 2009) is possible, even probable. The importance of this to practice is clearly articulated in the dialogue and the reference to the need for a process that facilitates co-learning illustrates it. At the heart of this is the

fundamental belief that community members have expertise and that by developing respectful relationships founded on that premise, and by simply sharing theoretical thinking, a process of mutual learning and action can be nurtured.

This is practice that is grounded in critical thinking, that strives to challenge the structures of oppression and discrimination that result in social suffering and limited life chances, and that fully understands the need for a knowing of the unknown or a revealing of hidden experiences. This dialogue certainly has elements of critical thinking throughout and it is reminiscent of Freire's (2016:52) contention that:

> the role of the progressive educator is to challenge the learner's naïve curiosity in order that they can both share criticalness. That is how education practice can affirm itself as the unveiling of hidden truths.

More than just an education process, the participants are suggesting that the explicit learning process allows for a power-sharing exercise and is a catalyst for positive social action, closer to conscientisation. Conversely, they are suggesting the lack of understanding of community development process by people in a geographical community because it is not being made explicit, is counterproductive. More than that, it is illustrative of how practice can be undertaken 'in the service of domination' and therefore 'cannot cause critical and dialectic thinking; rather it stimulates naïve thinking about the world' (Freire 2016:12). Staying within the boundaries and limitations of naïve thinking is anathema to the intentions of the participants in their involvement with community development processes.

Influence, rights-based and accountability.

Ultimately (as we have seen in chapter 1), community development practice is defined as being grounded in collaboration with people in communities and in striving for positive social change (Gilchrist & Taylor 2011; Ledwith 2011; Hogget *et al* 2009; Shaw 2004; Mayo 1977). As significantly stressed by Scottish Community Development Centre (2001:5) it involves 'changing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives'. This is an extremely demanding ask but this dialogue emphasises the potential of using a rights-based approach as a community development tool, and catalyst, for challenging the perceived structural power of policy makers and service providers. A catalyst to challenge them to listen, but perhaps more significantly, to be accountable and to take action on social inequalities.

U - But it's a great approach to something because it's a human right; housing is a human right need. So why are they not? They should have been providing this housing as it is, so there shouldn't have been such a big deal about it. But I think the problem is in the terminology and you know the sort of 'aye human rights it will go to court' and all that stuff but it's another community development process that you can use…it can be used; because obviously there's not just housing, you know children's rights and all that stuff as well. But for us it was all to do with the housing rights. Ach yeah and so trying to teach that, so we used a lot of action research, it was all stuff that you should be doing as a practitioner anyway!

L - It's a radical approach U.

U - Yeah.

L - I mean radical because we are in a neoliberal society.

U - Mhmmn.

L - People just want us to shut up, they don't actually want community development in the sense that we would understand community development, that is transformative for communities.

U - Yeah.

L – Actually, public authorities don't want that because it's too challenging. So what we saw in the human rights based approach work is active citizenship, is people learning about their rights, people learning how to carry out Participatory Action Research and then carrying it out to such a strong process that you have something like, what, 50% return rates. And those were in-depth surveys, conversations, heart-to-heart, two and three hours of people actually talking to each other.

U - Yeah.

L - So when you have that strength of opinion, and then people learning about their rights and then how to turn those conversations into human rights indicators to hold public authority to account, they were shitting themselves, they were actually shitting themselves. And so then you add into that the power of social media, the power of the UN Rapporteur for Housing retweeting our film, the power of Ken Loach retweeting our film, you know things going completely viral and then our film being shown at the Scottish Parliament on International Human Rights Day in front of the whole of civic society and political society Scotland. No wonder the head of Housing went 'oh fuck'. Actually, it was because you were doing your job to a degree that is actually for you and me, not radical at all.

U – Aye, it's normal for us.

L – It's no rocket science, it's no radical at all, it's just proper community development work. But for those that are in power they are not used to that; they are not used to that transference of power to the people who are powerless. They are not used to hearing their voices and showing mould in the Parliament round people's rooms… they are no used to that.

U - Nut.

L - But equally they are also not used to us going to the AGM… [and] people saying: 'you know what, this has changed my life'. When are officers going to hear that kind of language?

U - Nut, never.

L - Or speaking to D and actually getting into D's house, what a big thing that was for him.

U - I know, I know.

L - Over 18 months of you working with him, from him not wanting to open the door to anybody, to him fucking making speeches at the parliament, I mean…

U - I know. It's amazing.

L - If nothing else I was involved in in my life, that's been worth it.

U - Yeah.

L - So you know, it's no wonder that this radical approach, which is no really radical at all, is perceived in a way that is contentious.

U - Aye.

The centrality of a participatory action research approach to their community development practice is emphasised here, particularly as a tool for facilitating learning and action with processes of conscientisation triggered by a human rights analysis. It is evident that this came about through a lengthy process of door knocking and relationship building as a catalyst for community members to come together to notice commonality.

Garcia-Lamarca's (2017:429) analysis of community development process in housing is useful here as she suggests people move through stages of 'realizing one is not alone, losing fear, shame and guilt and gaining information' as a foundation for moving forward together in collective challenging and activism for change. The dialogue reveals a similar process that starts with the expression of people's lived experiences and a voicing of shared struggles with mould, sewage and rat infestations, developing into a shared awareness of the extra-ordinariness of living in substandard housing conditions, and then moves to

collectively challenging it as profoundly unacceptable. The participants stress the importance of this process being contextualised by human rights and particularly the centrality of using the right to adequate housing, Article 25 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948), as leverage.

This is a dynamic collaborative process of revealing hidden injuries and social abjection. It is simultaneously one of learning, of raising voice to educate others through dialogue, of action research, film and formal democratic process, and of holding the local authorities as 'landlords' and service providers to account, whilst attempting to educate politicians and wider society. This is complex action with transformative intent.

Ledwith (2016:5) points to this 'questioning the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life' as a central aspect of community work and this also connects to Bourdieu's (1999) thinking about the 'hidden injuries' of social inequalities. The picture presented of people living in mixed tenure housing with mould and with sewage coming up drains may seem an obvious social problem that ought to be readdressed. But the insipidly violent nature of the constant stress of living with that (and it consistently not being dealt with) is less obvious to those who don't look, don't ask, and don't engage (McGarvey 2017). Or indeed to those who subscribe to Murray's (1984) 'undeserving poor' perspective.

Shor's (1992:122) concept of 'extra-ordinarily experiencing the ordinary' is illuminating here because the participants are detailing a dynamic process of making the hidden injuries visible and doing so locally with people living in unacceptable, but dangerously accepted and profoundly damaging, situations. The human rights analysis is detailed as a central cog in this process of raising awareness from personal to political levels in striving for positive social change. The power of moving from a life situation of *not wanting to open the door to*

anybody to speaking up about the injustice of sub-standard housing conditions at the Scottish Parliament, and holding parliamentarians to account using a human rights context, represents a process of relationship building, conscientisation and political intent. This is community development practice as a collaborative process and a revealing of the ravages of hidden social injuries, a public framing of them as social problems rather than individual weaknesses or pathologies, and of a local to global conversation as an awareness raising process. It is illustrative of Craig's (1998:15) thoughts on how people's expressed opinions about their lived experiences ought to be 'at the front rather than at the end of political debate'.

The references to radical practice *which is no really radical at all* is an important one and it represents one of the interesting aspects of community development practice and the ongoing analyses of it. As we have seen, Ledwith (2020; 2016; 2007) states that there has always been a radical agenda at the core of community development practice because of the commitment to striving for social justice, and Arshad (1996:159) defines community work as radical when it is grounded in 'an analysis of power and structural inequality'. Taking Martin's (1987) well used and much referenced model of community work, Popple (2015:102) equates the 'radical model' with community development because of an 'emphasis on innovative, informal, political education' as opposed to the consensus or reformist aspects of community work practice. Furthermore, my own work has also argued that the transformation agenda at the core of community development practice has radical intent (McEwan-Short 2015). However, this dialogue sparks my interest because it challenges my thinking in its contention that practice that strives for basic human rights ought to be framed as ordinary, not radical: *it's no really radical at all*.

The premise here is that if we frame the push for decent housing, the eradication of sewage in people's sinks and the right to live free from rodent infestations as radical practice rather

than an investment in basic human rights, then perhaps we are in danger of colluding with the very neoliberal social abjection processes that render people living in poverty as 'Other' and somewhat lesser deserving human beings (Tyler 2013).

Rather, if we start from the premise that people living in poverty in social housing are equal to those not living in poverty, then a contention that a process of political awareness, a reframing of individual struggles as structural inequalities, and a fight for basic human rights, is 'radical practice' potentially becomes fundamentally flawed. In other words, if we frame the practice of learning together about the impact of living in substandard housing whilst raising awareness of adequate housing as a basic human right as 'radical' (in order to influence policy and practice to change), then we have to reflect on whether we are actually stimulating naïve thinking and unconsciously feeding the dominant discourse.

It is easy to conclude there is nothing radical about the right to live in adequate housing and to be respected enough in society to live without sewage in sinks and rodents and mould at home, as U so pointedly states: *They should have been providing this housing as it is, so there shouldn't have been such a big deal about it.* This potentially takes us to a place where if we accept that community development practice must be underpinned by an analysis of power and structural inequalities in striving for social justice, then the question of whether we ought to frame that as radical requires further thought and debate.

J – And so … is the human rights approach that you are talking about actually community development process or is it something different?

L – I think it's a community development process because if you look at the principles which are about participation, accountability, non-discrimination (which means really looking at the

most vulnerable), empowerment, and then you've got the legal framework which is added in there. So, for me it's another tool, tae be…

J – So the human rights brings the legal?

L – Brings the legal framework and the accountability back in and it's very clear about accountability. So, we might be dead good at participation, dead good at you know looking at the most marginalised in terms of social justice, we're probably pretty good at empowerment but what we don't do very well in community development is that accountability aspect.

J – The legal accountability?

L – Legal accountability and accountability for indicators of how things are actually going to move forwards. So, what we did in this process was the community defined their own indicators. Fuck the indicators that are out there because the indicators that are out there show that [name] Council is the third best landlord in Scotland, this is not the lived experience of people. Okay so if that's the case fuck those indicators coz they don't actually mean anything to anybody and let's set up our own indicators. So, the community set up their own indicators that they wanted to base the Council's performance against. And then the legal bit was bringing in the International Human Rights law. What does the human rights law say about an adequate standard of living, the right to an adequate standard of living, what does that actually mean. Does it mean that when the sewage is actually coming up through your sink and through your washing machine and you've got to replace your washing machine every six months, does that actually fit with this legal definition? We practically gave them the law and said: 'Right, does it fit? Nut. Right okay, well there we are. How are we going to frame that?' So everything was framed within that legal framework as well so that there was an understanding of the right to an adequate standard of housing which is actually quite an easy thing to understand because it's about tenure and affordability and habitability, you know it's very, very clearly set out.

J – Yeah. Yes.

L - And then also looking at the national housing law as well to say, 'actually well where is it meeting national housing law?'.

U – It's not.

L - Well it's no, right so let's put that in the report. So not only in the report has it got the process of how you've gathered evidence as a community, how you've set the indicators, what you want to see improved in the year's time. It's also got in there, International law and the local law of the country that the duty bearer (which is the public authority) has to respond to. So for me the rights-based approach can be completely transformative for communities because it's putting them at the heart, they're the rights holders: 'Excuse me we are going to hold you to account, you're the public authority, I don't need to be asking you for this, you have to already be delivering this and you're not and so we'll hold you accountable'. And that's where the panel process for me brings the strength, the accountability mechanism, and the legal mechanism.

J – So it's using community development process but what you would suggest is that it's actually because of the rights-based approach that you manage to push it further, manage to really challenge further?

L – Absolutely, it's about holding public authorities to account at the end of the day, isn't it?

U – Yeah.

L - It's so exciting, it's the most alive I've ever been in my work!

U – Yeah, I'm the same!

L – The most challenging absolutely, but the most alive in terms of being in tune with my whole understanding of community development.

Fisher & Shragge (2008:6) criticise what they call 'contemporary community work' for a tendency to 'follow a single path' that involves community development work as capacity building 'for their own sake'. Here we have practitioners in dialogue revealing practice that treads a complex path from relationship building, engagement, and learning, to educating others and engaging with political process. The rights-based approach is presented as central to that with an acknowledgement that 'ultimately, transformative change will also require a shift in hierarchical power relations' (Lister 2004:174). There is no sense of limited ameliorative practice here that, for example, could involve people in communities collectively dealing with the rats, the damp, or the sewage, rather than getting to the source of the problem. The 'landlords' are targeted in a systematic way, using community-led action research to generate evidence and a rigorous case for change grounded in human rights. Freire's (1997:23) words are ever relevant to this:

> I recognise reality. I recognise obstacles, but I refuse to resign in silence or to be reduced to a soft, ashamed, sceptical echo of the dominant discourse.

An analysis of power is commonly considered to be at the heart of community development practice (Ledwith 2016; Popple 2015; Hoggett *et al* 2009; Shaw 2004). As Mayo (2017:118) points out, power is of course multi-dimensional, at once simply the ability to 'enforce your will on others' but also grounded in the quietly systemic process of 'social policies that set out to manage people's behaviours…in line with neoliberal economic agendas, stigmatising 'dependency' and applying sanctions' that damage people already suffering the impacts of social inequalities. The participants consistently refer to the challenges of engaging with community development practice that pushes against such systemic power and the status quo and challenges the power holders (in this case deemed to be the local authority).

They consequently engage community development as ongoing hopeful practice that influences people at community level but also never loses sight of the need to challenge beyond, to get to the source of the problems, and to educate at the level at which power is held.

U – Well we had that big conference with [national organisations] …about using human rights and community development and what are the tools that as practitioners you need to enable this, and it was a really good started conversation. I think there's still a lot of work that needs to be done but we need to be doing this more. And for [national organisation] you know for them to start getting involved…coz [our organisation] is such a local organisation and so to be able to have all these relationships with national organisations, it's good, that's how you get it rolled out… there's so much more buzz about human rights and using the approach, it's so good to see.

The need for a complex process of engagement from local to global meant that presenting at conferences on the approaches used, and processes engaged with, formed an important part of the participants' attempts to both educate others and learn from community developers' thinking both nationally and internationally. Alongside this, participant L emphasises the action in striving for broader national impact and the process of engaging with national organisations in dialogue to challenge their practices:

L – …and for me that's massive. That's what the project was always about for me…about influencing this at national level for Scotland's communities and if we could use the microcosm of [geographical area] and those three blocks in [same geographical area] to start that national conversation, how amazing would that be? Well fuck me; the conversation is well and truly alight!

U – Definitely, it definitely is!

L – …and internationally the conversation is happening this year because of the World Community Development conference in Dundee…so that whole second day will focus on using a rights-based approach in CD…what's really interesting…[is that] the First Minister's Advisory Group on human rights leadership for Scotland, three times in the report said that our work is the work that needs to be going forward in Scotland. So we have the UN chief, chair of the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Committee saying we want this work to be happening globally; right we've got the First Minister saying we want this to be happening in Scotland; we've got the funders…the minister for human rights…[saying] 'I want this to be rolled out across Scotland'…we've got SCDC, we've got NHS Health Scotland…Human Rights Consortium, Amnesty International, we've got Glasgow Uni Law school, we've got CLDSC all interested in this approach in the work that we've been doing to roll out across Scotland…

The importance of presenting at conferences and building national and international alliances in striving for wider societal impact cannot be underestimated, but strikingly in doing so the participants do not lose sight of the lived experiences of people in communities they are engaging with. In the following moving quote about the experiences seen at community level, whilst simultaneously presenting examples of the everyday ravages of life in poverty in sub-standard rented housing and how it can cause 'worthlessness' (Lister 2004), U reflects on the importance community development process has in making changes to people's everyday lives:

U - It got people talking, you know, and it got people putting their Christmas lights out again and having people round for, you know, round at Christmas. People were very lonely, and it got a community buzzing again.

Whilst absolutely subscribing to the need to effect structural change, Seal & Harris (2014) highlight the importance of achievements that may be perceived as somewhat ‘smaller’. It could be easy to diminish the importance of the kind of changes U details here as limited or ameliorative and that only political impact and broader social change matters; this I suggest would be both disrespectful and disingenuous.

The painful truth of the injuries experienced by people on an everyday basis is at the core of the dialogue and it paints a picture of the role of community development in mutually revealing that painful truth of the lived experiences of people, in framing it as a structural issue rather than an individual weakness and in using that framework to learn together, and to work together, to strive for positive social change at individual, community and political levels. This is the power of a process of mutual inquiry and of collective action, as opposed to the isolation and desperation of relentlessly trying to individually raise a complaint about rats, mould or sewage in your home and ultimately giving up. This is community development as collective, ‘personal is political’ process.

Power, pressure & collective resilience

The hope for wider impact is indeed a continuous thread throughout the dialogue and much as Freire (1997:12) states that ‘Hope of liberation does not mean liberation already. It is necessary to fight for it’. The dialogue is peppered with hope strengthened by a drive for the participants’ work to develop a rights-based approach as a tool for community development process at local levels but also nationally and internationally.

L – …the interesting thing is that there is definitely a trajectory for this thing to move forward in Scotland.

U – And one of the [local authority] officers and…managers…took it to one of her other areas and started using some of the kind of things we were using, some of the similar things that we were doing…

L – But not the accountability aspect.

U – No, but some of the, you know, action research and placing it in the hands of the community which is what we know is the best way to do it. But for them it's a new way of [working]… the Council said: 'well, we are going to be doing work in this area'. And what we did, or what the community did, was change how that funding was going to be spent coz the Council were going to be spending it on things that they saw needing done but the tenants then said 'well actually this is where you really should be spending it' and so that's what they did. And I think that shows what power that can be done.

L – And let's be honest they've got £3.3 million of investment over the space of the two years that you were working there.

U – Yeah, yeah.

L - Because of the approach that you used…but that power element has to be exposed, has to be exposed. I can't go to other communities in Scotland and say let's use this approach with any honesty in my heart without that analysis of power: 'by the way when you put your head up this is what will happen'. And so that's the network that we have to create in Scotland as human rights defenders in community development to be able to withstand and withhold and recognise when that power is going to come, where it is going to come from, what it is going to look like, how to respond to it and how to build an alliance to respond to it. So that's the next mission, eh?

U – Yeah!

A strong theme highlighted in this dialogue is around the challenges and dilemmas of working with community-led need that sits as a direct challenge to local authorities as power holders. Hogget, Mayo & Miller (2009) point to ethical challenges as well as emotional strains inherent to the complex nature of community development practice and noticeably there are numerous places in this dialogue where ethical considerations are highlighted. The participants detail their engagement in progressive community development practice that was challenging to power dynamics in local authorities and that unfortunately came at a cost to them both, significantly impacting on their own health and well-being.

Contextualising that as being a direct result of the challenges that came from *putting your head up,* the dialogue emphasises the need for recognition of the impact this kind of activism for change can have both at a personal and community levels. Gilchrist & Taylor (2011) note that by occupying contradictory spaces, community development workers are faced with particularly challenging situations, and Hoggett *et al* (2009:61) emphasise the impacts on self as community development workers strive to 'deal with multiple, complex and competing agendas and must exercise agency in a loose and shifting framework'. The drive to hear the stories of rat infestations, mould, and sewage within a framework of relationship building, caring, human rights analysis and activism for social change meant the participants were charged with a complex set of requirements and a difficult path to negotiate.

There is much written about the role of the community worker as straddling a place that sits with and against the state as government agendas do not necessarily match community needs or are even at odds with them (Craig *et al* 2011). The result of that Hoggett *et al* (2009:61) suggest is that workers (and community members) 'find themselves in a 'no win' situation'. It is indeed clear that this process came at a cost and some of that comes from an imbalanced relationship in which the local authority is the 'landlord' and service provider but also, significantly, the project funder. Challenging the actions of the 'landlord' and holding

them to account using a human rights framework is therefore a difficult terrain to navigate and cross. This has indeed been a challenging process and remains so, not least because of the funding dynamic.

L - ...do you know the thing is, there are probably things we could have done differently, done better.

U - Yeah.

L - But when you are learning and you are leading something nationally…there's always going to be an element of risk when you're doing something that nobody else has done…so we knew there were going to be some risks we just didn't anticipate I think the power kick back…

U - Yeah and I think if we had been independently funded it would of [been different]

L - It would have been even more fucking raj, it would have been brilliant, can you imagine?

U - But because the organisation is funded by the Council, although we are independent, there is that element of then well how independent are you really? I think that's what I began to see …

L - We were not independent at all.

U - We are not independent and actually…

L - Under the thumb.

U - Yeah…also I think the pressures on Councils for their budgets now you know, they are just whipping budgets from all organisations left right and centre…

L - …if we'd been independently funded it would have been different.

J - That's the challenge?

L - Oh yeah!... there's great folk out there as well though, brilliant activists.

U - Oh yeah there is, there is a lot of really good people. So, we'll wait and see if they are going to get the investment or if it is just going to get swept under the carpet. I don't know but I mean there's still all the areas that I work in and I think there's still so much that needs to be done where it comes back to the fighting of the resources, you know things like that, everyone trying to fight their own corner…

The issue of funding and the dilemmas that come from being funded by organisations, such as a local authority that provides funds whilst having particular investments, is a real and ongoing challenge for community development practice (Hoggett *et al* 2016). Here we see in practice the neoliberal-led funding dilemmas (Shaw 2007) and the push towards individualised service responses to government-induced hardship (Alston 2019; Tyler 2013; Giroux 2010). Community development is not immune to this pressure and astute reactions are required.

L - Absolutely and that's the massive tension for me in my career, I can no longer do that, I can't do service provision anymore coz it's not community development.

U - Nut, nut.

J - Yeah, so you are pushed into service provision…?

L - Oh, I'm not interested, no.

J - You can't?

L - No, I can't do that actually coz then it's disempowering for the people that I'm working with, people that I'm serving.

U - Uhu [it is].

L - Like how could you possibly say 'by the way you've got mould in your houses, but you are not allowed to misrepresent the Council' - Fuck off, actually!

U - I know, yes!

L - 'Gonna keep quiet about that? – Nut'. So it puts you in a tension position as well, but 'no I'm no gonna dae that, I'm not gonna keep quiet about that and I'm going to empower people and here's how we are going to do it: we're going to have workshops on how to do, em how to write press releases, how to do public speaking, how to carry out participatory action research, how to dae human rights, let's do a training programme on that', eh U?

U - Yeah, yep. I mean that's the best way to do it and we were getting good attendance at stuff as well, you know. And then when you see, there was one of our tenants that comes quite a lot and you know she found it very hard to engage because she was a single tenant as well. She came to so many of our training sessions and she ended up writing a deputation to put up to the Council.

The dialogue represents the contradictory space that community development workers are faced with navigating. In this situation, community development as uneasy practice (Banks 2007) with its dilemmas and challenges comes alive. There is, at times, a painful depiction of hopeful practice, driven by a commitment to striving for positive change that is grounded in what for many are ordinary everyday expectations: a mould free home, a rat free home and the ability to utilise kitchens without the presence of sewerage in sinks and washing machines. Also, a sense that the participants felt they had no choice but to strive together with community members to voice, highlight, raise awareness and activate for change.

Knowing the lived experiences of community members meant that the participants felt compelled to strive for positive change with them, against heavy odds. That said, the sense of optimism never leaves the narrative and even whilst describing some very difficult challenges to self, to practice, to community members, the participants are ever driven by their commitment to striving for positive social change using community development

process and human rights analysis as leverage, even when feeling under attack. The importance of the strong theoretical foundations combined with their strong network of relationships to this is evident:

L - So actually that radical action and enabling and empowering people, really empowering people, and I hate the word empowering because they have the power there already, they just hadn't been unleashed in the sense of them knowing.

U - Yeah.

L - …and that actually is what has happened. So that neoliberalism has come round in full circle, to the point where the power dynamics just want to crush any kind of movement to challenge their own power. And if you describe some of the tactics that those in power have used, it's disgusting.

J - Against you…?

L - Against us individually as workers, against the organisation at the local grass roots level, against the activists at the grass roots level. Honestly if you could document it, it's horrific, actually horrific. So what we tried to do was actually take that personality stuff out of it and actually analyse the power dynamics and some of the stuff coming up, first of all they'd try to ridicule the work, so they tried to tear apart the methodology which we'd had a lot of support from [national agencies]…in supporting us in the methodology.

J - In the human rights-based approach?

L - In our rights-based approach yeah. So, we were solid in the methodology.

U - Yep.

L - So the Council tried to ridicule the methodology, then they ridiculed the report, which was written by the tenants, saying things like: 'that's not our pigeon waste, that's not our pigeons' or 'they're not our rats'. So as part of evidence we got people to take photos of the rats'

infestations and the pigeon infestations in their homes and one of the responses from quite a senior Council officer was…

U - 'They don't belong here'.

L - 'They're not our rats'. Like as if we would go on Google images and just download them! You know the whole participatory element of that was if people can't come to meetings let them send in photos, let them take temperatures of their house, let them tell us their stories, let them participate in that way so that we had lots and lots of evidence built up and lots of people participating.

U - Yep.

L - So the second part was okay 'just laugh at them'.

U - Yep.

L - 'Let's try and attack their integrity' was kind of the next stage of the process, then when…

J - Is this all by [senior local authority workers]?

U - Yeah.

L - Yeah, pretty much.

U - Yeah, coz we, part of the process is…people on the ground wanted to target the managers and the high-end politicians rather than…

J - The decision makers?

U - Yeah, yeah, exactly, the ones that could make the decisions. So, we were having meetings with pretty high up Council officers. Em, to be fair there was one officer that we did build quite a good relationship with but as soon as they were taken out of the mix …it went completely downhill from there as well. It was going back to the same it was like 'oh but we've done enough now' that sort of attitude… I think there was a fire in one of the landings and it was like 'we should just do all the landings in all the buildings now'. And that wasn't even at the request of the community that was just the [Local Authority worker] …

L - Taking over that participation stuff.

U - Yeah.

L - So the next stage of how that power analysis worked was then when they couldn't shake the methodology or the theory behind it, or the reputation of me and U and some of the other folk involved, was then to…things like threatening with eviction.

U - Yup.

L - …with chasing Council tax arears over twenty years. But then also threatening them in terms of their social standing within the community… rumours being spread…trying to set up an alternative tenants group behind the back of the community who had been engaged and involved… eventually threatening [the organisation's] funding and agreement 'if you don't shut up', pretty much.

U - Yeah.

L - So that kind of experience, where do we ever hear that? Where do we ever hear about that? Where do we ever hear about the resilience that's needed for the likes of us? My god, if I hadn't had U, I'd have cracked up a long time ago. If I hadn't had the international connections that I've got, I would have well cracked up because it was only going to them in terms of CD practice [lists names], so we had those folk to bounce ourselves off.

U - Yeah, yeah.

J - So does that keep you going then?

L - Yeah.

U - To know that we weren't alone in what was actually happening to us and the community.

L - Yeah, you could actually then look at the process of human rights defenders globally and these models of power are replicated globally, but it's shite when you are in the middle of it.

U - Oh yeah!

L - It's shite isn't it?

U - *Yep!*

L - But thank God we had those alliances and nationally in Scotland we had very, very strong alliances as well.

U - Yeah.

L - That helped me to keep my head up and be resilient. So that in the end the difficulty has been with the local authority that you are trying to influence, and with the power structure within the community because they don't want to give up power if they've had it for twenty years either…

J - …is the Board all community members/tenants?

U - They are all tenants.

L - They are all tenants. So, you can understand where they are coming from possibly, this was just too radical.

U - And, and, you know, I think what it could be if they are threatening, if the funders, in this case the Council, are threatening the wider funding for the whole organisation…so if that threat for everything just to be completely pulled, then you can understand why the tenants would be nervous, the management committee would be nervous about it.

The dialogue above is just a snippet of the descriptions from the participants of the impact the attempts to challenge power and influence change had on them and on some community members. Whilst Meade *et al* (2016:7) pointedly state that 'community development comes with an explicit commitment to the reshaping of power relations', they go on to suggest that 'it is not always obvious what form power is presumed to take' and put simply, it is not easy. There is what could be described as a sense of dumbfounded disbelief from the participants as they discuss their experiences of the actions of key local authority representatives in response to their collaborative attempts to challenge for positive change. However, this was

compounded by what they experienced as blocking to the process by some community members and management committee members, despite the sought changes being potentially of benefit to them.

The neoliberal-led drive by the local authority for quick fixes (painting the stairs) and individualised responses (waiting for a house move) or even blaming individuals (your actions cause the mould) are reminiscent of how Giroux (2012:92) talks of the 'neoliberal theater of cruelty'. This, he suggests, results in poverty and its ramifications being presented as individual weaknesses, with people being 'prevented from connecting the dots between their own personal troubles and larger social problems' and, as U suggests, people simply *put up or wait for the house move*.

The participants' collaborative community drive to frame personal struggles as political issues undoubtedly impacted at local level, resulting in positive relationships and community level changes with influence at national policy levels, but as the political framing became threatening to the status quo of the local authority's service provision, the participants experienced the very processes of shut down that Giroux (2012) refers to. Compounded by a tenant-led management committee experiencing threats to project funding, and threats to individuals' already precarious financial situations (chasing Council tax arears), their decision to no longer use the human rights framework to push for change could be further illustrated by Giroux's (2012:95) words on neoliberal-led 'economic Darwinism':

> in which a culture of ignorance serves to depoliticize the larger public whilst simultaneously producing individual and collective subjects necessary and willing to participate in their own oppression.

Arguably, perhaps ironically, these are the very ravages of neoliberalism on service provision, on individuals, on communities and on wider society, that demand the kind of community development approaches the participants are detailing in their dialogue. The participants know the lived experiences of the people living in poverty in diminished social housing and the challenges that come with private renting, and they remain clear and optimistic about what a community development process using human rights analysis can offer; this optimism remains in the participants' thoughts for moving forward.

There are also clear messages in the dialogue about potential ways of navigating the kinds of challenges to practice the participants have been experiencing. They particularly point to the importance of knowing, and being explicit about, the theoretical framework for their work as a buffer for surviving what they experience as attacks on their credibility. More so, they also point to the supportive strength of their relationship with each other as crucial to their resilience in this situation, further strengthened by the support from their networks of like-minded people involved in similar work and experiencing similar challenges, locally, nationally and internationally:

L - …I've got those international connections and I've got that resilience of connections in Scotland.

J - So one of the things that I'm particularly interested in is how you can make that process happen in this neoliberal context when so many other people stop…you guys have kept it going…But what I'm hearing is that you've kept it going because you've also had collective action of your own, networks of your own, grounded in theory, grounded in the values and principles, and not losing sight of that really through everything. And also having those broader connections to keep it, to keep you, going?

L - I think that's what kept me going.

U - Mhmn, I think having L kept me going.

J - So your relationship [with each other] as well?

U - Yeah, yeah.

J - You started with relationship, but your relationship is also fundamental to that?

U - Yeah.

L - It's always been tight…And actually the relationship we had in the project; I've never seen a synergy like it in terms of organisations coming together.

U - Yeah.

L & U - (both speaking together to list local and national organisations that were partners in the project).

L - And the synergy between these organisations, we all got it, like that, like there was, I can't even remember there being a bit when we were like 'nah this is no gonnae work'. We all got it, we understood the theory, we understood the practice, we understood the transformative power it could have and we all really like each other.

J - And you were all doing it together then?

L - U was the main kind of…

U - On the ground, yeah.

L-– But we had a project board, between all of those [organisations].

U - Yes, yes, we had like the organisation project board and then in the community level we had the project board with the Council and the tenants and [the organisation] and [a national organisation]. So yeah, and it was great to be able to get on instantly with people … my relationship with H from the [national organisation] is amazing.

L - Incredible, yeah.

U - We bounced off each other and I think having that network…you know, I could just phone up [a city] if I was really frustrated with some of the stuff that was going on in the community, it would just be like 'aaargh' so even just to blow off a bit of steam and to hear that 'this is okay this is part of the process'…yeah.

The importance of supportive, active relationships and networks to community development practice is particularly stressed here with the participants choosing to frame it as 'collective resilience'. One of the particularly noticeable threads in this dialogue is that the participants emphasise different aspects of community development practice in framing their own perspectives on their work together. Far from a weakness of practice, this demonstrates the collaborative nature of community development in that their approach illustrates a partnership of community action and impact at local to national levels, with action towards, and hope for, international influence.

U - At the end of the day we're very proud of what we've achieved because we have pushed the buttons.

L - Incredibly.

And rightly so, I would suggest. It is easy to see why Garcia-Lamarca (2017a:427) proudly defends processes of 'empowerment and collective struggle as the most effective way to solve housing problems'. However, alongside a celebration of their work, there is humility in their reflections on the processes undertaken and in whether, and how, things may have been different.

The participants' concluding statements come right back to the social injustices at the core of the dialogue, people living in sub-standard situations in rented housing engaged in community development processes to challenge for change. Also, the challenges of this being facilitated by the community development workers funded by the local authority:

L - (talking about U's values and practice) so you can see what she would be like with tenants having sewage coming up through their sinks, eh U? The sense of social justice.

J - That's absolutely horrendous, sewage coming up sinks.

U - Oh it's awful. And…the Council were wanting to go in and put in all these nice fancy new kitchens and bathrooms but weren't wanting to tackle the issue of the sewage coming up. And…that's when the tenants said: 'what's the point of putting these in if you…you know, they're just going to get ruined'.

L - Deal with the sewage first, eh

U - Yeah, yeah

L - A real life view of community work, at the coal face.

A real-life view presented by the dialogue that embraces action and impact at local level alongside a clear commitment to broader strategic influence and action. A real-life view grounded in human rights that is hopeful yet, at times, painful; critically aware yet caring and respectful; and ultimately active, engaged, collaborative, political and impactful.

Messages from the dialogue

The dialogue presents a complex picture of community development practice grounded in relationships, care, compassion, hope and significantly a clear drive for action towards social

and political change. There is a sense that the participants believe fundamental social change is possible through collective, political process and they strive together to make a difference to people's lives. They suggest involvement in community development process is hopeful but also impactful at individual, community, and political levels. This comes about, they suggest, because of their commitment to a rights-based approach that enables a process of community engagement, action research, community-led indicators for change, and accountability driven action that challenges policy makers and service providers to act.

Building a picture of their practice, the participants stress the centrality of their work being led by people in communities, referring to it as 'in the hands of the community'. They detail a range of approaches including continuous deliberate efforts to reach out to a diversity of people using door knocking and dialogue to find out what their perspectives are and whether they want to be involved in social action to improve their life circumstances. The community worker is represented as an ally and facilitator with a role in mutual education for social change.

Relationships are central to their roles on every level. They stress that the strength of their own relationship is vital, and this involves ongoing support for each other, but also importantly a sharing of values and theoretical perspectives driving their approach. Their dialogue is peppered with comments grounded in mutual respect and care. The relationships theme however extends well beyond their engagement with each other to an acknowledgement of the importance of relationships with community activists and with local, national, and international community workers and partners. The relationships are notably key to developing their work, keeping it on track, engaging others in the process, understanding the potential for social change, and knowing the different actions that may be beneficial to undertake. However, the relationships are also crucial to their own well-being. They acknowledge the many challenges of their work and the need for tight, supportive

networks of like-minded colleagues and activists as they ‘put their heads up’ and challenge for positive social change. Collective resilience is necessary as they engage with complex power dynamics.

The participants openly highlight the many challenges they face in their work suggesting they are related to power and the impact of neoliberalism and market-led public policies. At times they are frustrated and concerned about things not changing. Notably, their frustration mainly comes from the barriers they face that are more grounded in power held by landlords or by the management committee. Their respect for community members tends not to waiver.

Notably, the social issues the participants highlight are not new. The challenging life circumstances experienced by community members are presented as structural issues that impact negatively on people’s daily lives at basic human need level to their democratic rights. Writing in 1977, O’Malley describes living conditions of housing tenants in a way that mirrors the participants’ portrayal of the challenges facing people in communities to this day. Indeed, her words could easily be mistaken for the participants’ who are speaking over forty years later:

> Maggie described the factors which led to her decision to squat - first her housing conditions: The lavatory from the flat above flushed straight into the kitchen. There was sometimes 3 inches of sewage in the place. The house produced £20 a week rent, but there were no repairs done. The agent said he couldn’t do any without a letter from the landlord, and he lived in the south of France. Why should he bother? If we didn’t pay the rent, the next tenant would…Maggie was right…she discovered that her old basement flat has been let to a West Indian woman and four children, at

> almost double the rent, and still no repairs done…I began to ask myself why should I live like this? (O'Malley 1977:53).

These words are disturbingly reminiscent of the experiences of people in communities in Scotland today that are highlighted in this dialogue. Significantly, O'Malley (1977:60) goes on to conclude that community development process enabled a 'challenging [of] the authority of the private land-lord and the Council over the quality of housing provided' and that through this people in communities 'both gained direct political experience of how to deal with bureaucratic indifference, professional incompetence and open bullying' and that they also 'learned the importance of collective organisation in the struggle to assert their needs over the official criteria of housing need and private profit'. Again, noticeably similar processes to those outlined in the dialogue above.

The argument is not that this community development practice is futile, rather it is needed more than ever, particularly against the heavy wave of neoliberalism and marketisation. Indeed, we must be wary of interpreting the difficulties of impacting for positive social change as weaknesses of community development process and reframe them as the realities of neoliberal fervour (Giroux 2011). It would be easy to despair about the similarities between my thinking and O'Malley's conclusions, however as long as we live in a society in which inequalities prevail such social suffering will remain. Far from concluding that community development is futile against this tidal wave, my conclusion is the opposite, grounded in relief that there are community development workers coming together with community members to activate for change. In this context my conclusions are that politically motivated community development action is needed, more than ever.

The participants suggest that the human rights analysis underpinning their community development practice is what enables them to collectively impact for change. They paint a picture of their practice that represents a conceptual framework using human rights and Freirean ideology grounded in an understanding of structural inequalities. They have a strong commitment to striving collaboratively for positive social change, with a hopeful view that the practice and experiences will influence future practice from local to global perspectives.

Despite the very real challenges of striving to work in this way that they have explicitly shared, the predominant thread throughout is of hopeful practice driven by an enduring commitment to tackling social inequalities and to striving to make society a better place. In discussing community development as a process of striving for social change and simultaneously acknowledging the inherent challenges, Garcia-Lamarca (2017a:423) neatly helps sum up the golden thread running through this dialogue:

> …at its most effective, this protest is transformative, emancipatory political process that disrupts the status quo, enacts equality and creates political subjects.

This is community development as a complex, dynamic and active process that is situated in relationships, founded on a clear theoretical framing, striving for respect for, recognition of, and action on, people's lived experiences of social injustice. The participants dialogue on their practice as a process of pushing for accountability and ultimately of striving to be a catalyst for positive social change at local, national, and international levels.

Triggering the national and international conversation is at once hopeful practice for the future but it also represents an important aspect of community development practice

revealed by this dialogue. The drive to work with people in the community, to know and understand their lived experiences, to undertake action research to uncover broader truths about life in the community, and to collaboratively take action on them to highlight the injustices as human rights violations and to demand change, is supported and strengthened by the national action in a way that merges the legitimacy of expressed lived experiences with the support of national political and academic networking for change. It is collaborative.

This is a complex, powerful, collaborative process and the participants stress their relationship with each other as a central cog in enabling this to happen. Alongside that, they emphasise the importance of their networks with people in communities and with national and international community development workers in managing to traverse tricky ground that strives to impact towards accountability and a joint embracing of basic human rights. Relationships, they stress, are central to the whole process along with a commitment to critically aware practice that is clearly grounded in a deep sense of caring and respect for people in communities, an understanding of the hidden injuries and personal challenges of living in substandard housing and also of the vibrancy and engagement of community members that community development process engenders.

The importance of community development as a process that strives for transformative change rather than limited ameliorative actions is stressed here and the participants never lose sight of that as their ultimate role.

DIALOGUE 2: Contradictory space

The participants in this dialogue both have lengthy experience of working in a Scottish Local Authority with a remit to work in geographical communities. They present their roles as working with people in communities to highlight community perspectives, to build community, and to influence policy and service provision, both locally and citywide. This manifests through organised partnerships but also through campaigning and awareness raising activities. Notably they prefer to refer to their roles as community workers however they also refer to their practice as community development.

T - If folk ask me, I talk about myself being a community worker.

LA – So do I, yeah… a community worker has a meaning I think to the general public.

J – People understand what you are talking about if you say that, do you think?

T – They understand more.

The participants portray the community worker as treading a fine line and operating in a contradictory space. Whilst acknowledging the opportunities for meeting and planning together, the contradictory space refers to the gap between the bureaucratic demands of Local Authority policy-led process and the sometimes-opposing opinions and demands of people in communities. Shaw's words (2011:128) are a useful illustration of this as she suggests that community development practice has traditionally drawn its legitimacy from developing a:

> …strategic position as a mediator in the relationship between the state and its citizens, through various forms of participation and community engagement.

However, much as Scott (2012) claims that community development is partisan by choice, there is a strong sense of the participants being 'on-the-side-of' people in communities throughout this dialogue, they do not waiver from that and they revisit it on numerous occasions.

This is a highly reflective dialogue in which the participants scrutinise their practice and intentions and they critique the everyday demands of negotiating differing loyalties.

The themes in this dialogue are:

- Partnership working and the tidy box
- Creating space and building alliances
- Contradictory space and intriguing dilemmas
- Time, commitment, and impact on self

The first three themes are weighty and the final one presented is much shorter, however the importance of it means its inclusion is equally necessary.

Partnership working and the tidy box

The dialogue begins by focussing on some of the challenges of the role and the participants immediately frame their approach as working in partnership both with people in communities and with agencies. They are working in geographical areas that are high on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation: 'a relative measure of deprivation across small areas of Scotland' (Scottish Government 2016:2). Much of their work is consequently undertaken in collaboration with people living in poverty, with challenging life circumstances and limited

resources. Miller and Rein (2011:83) point to the experience of living in poverty not simply as a lack of material resources but as 'a lack of power' and the participants' dialogue travels around their thinking about this in relation to the ongoing intricacies of their roles.

Together they acknowledge both the challenges and opportunities of a community work role that spins around the development, and facilitation, of formal partnerships that have come out of Government policy directives.

T – It's always been hard, but I was writing something today actually for another purpose, and community planning (I might have been kidding myself on) but it gave you some space to do things, and we help organise, in different bits of the city, community planning partnerships. And that notion of partnership at least on paper was that people brought things and shared them and the sharing of those things assisted in moving an agenda further forward…

LA – …the partnerships were really good…initially when we developed the community planning partnerships the difficulty was separating them and us: like local people always think of 'them officers' and 'us local people'.

J – Think of the partnership…?

LA – The workers being 'them' and local people being 'us' and the difficulty was getting everyone to see it as a partnership, that everybody was partners, that everybody was valid. And I had real positive, eh real positive results, getting the partnership to work as a partnership: getting people to be relied upon to progress actions, getting local people to see themselves as valued partners. And for me, I mean not all across the city, but for me and my partnership and how we progressed things, I felt really positive about it and how it really worked. Feedback would be: 'this is a demonstration of people being able to influence decision making' and things like that, it was good practice...

J – So you think the way the community planning partnerships were working, and how you were working as part of them, enabled a process of local people being involved in decision making?

LA – Yeah, and being able, free enough, or being able to discuss, bring these issues, bring actions, bring things to the table for discussion, at the very least…

T – …the interesting thing about that is that it came out of a Blairite agenda and probably had roots that go further back but it came out a Blairite agenda. And it was aboot sharing limited resources, and that had its critics, you know its limitations, but in comparison to now…

LA – Luxury!

T – Yeah. LA's point aboot having the opportunity to work in the context of community planning for ten years has generated some very good community engagement, there's no two ways roond that and the dilemmas of partnership are quite interesting. I think even after ten years, community representatives, folk in the community still hae some resistance to the notion of partnership, managing to maintain it, they worked within it but still saw the other partners as 'the other'.

LA – Mhmmn.

J – So not you as community workers but the other partners?

T – I think we are really special! I think on some days we got, no I was never captured as [the other] - see I'm kidding myself on, I think!

LA - Aye, you are!

T – Yeah, that's what makes the job interesting and worthwhile actually.

LA – It does, it does.

J – So, community engagement, local people involved in those decision-making processes and, influencing change?

T – Eh, yeah. Influencing things in their community which is change I guess, but maybe limited to there, and maybe making connections across the city, maybe no across the country, but across the city.

The notion of partnership working as a process that can work towards the active involvement of people in communities in planning, deciding, and implementing actions is highlighted as a positive role for community workers. It is reminiscent of Bryant and Bryant's (2011:137) thoughts on a social planning approach to community development, that is:

> …primarily concerned with changing the organisation of welfare institutions and producing a more sensitive fit between social policies and the needs of [communities]. The community worker operates at inter-organisational and intra-organisational levels, working to stimulate collaboration between established services and seeking to modify the internal structure and policies of formal institutions.

The participants are more specifically referring to community planning in Scotland as a government-led initiative situated within the improving public services Scottish Government agenda (Scottish Government 2016; Scottish Executive 2003). This involves developing formal partnerships with people in communities and organisations because as Local Authority community workers they are tasked with their 'active involvement as partners in Community Planning' (Scottish Executive 2004:7), thus collaborating to reduce inequalities and work towards social change that is positive and meaningful to communities.

The history of community work being influenced by government-led initiatives is well documented, as is the understanding that this comes with inherent challenges as well as opportunities for practice (Tett 2006; Craig 2011; Shaw 2011). Although they are clearly

presenting a picture of partnerships as a response to successive policy directives, the participants acknowledge the possibilities for a positive framing this approach brings. It involves them undertaking a linking role in striving for community voices to be heard, striving to create an openness to those voices having influence and ultimately for concerns and ideas to be acted upon. In this way they highlight the complexity of their roles in caretaking the partnerships and notably stress how difficult the role is: 'it's always been hard' being the opening gambit.

Accordingly, much as Bryant & Bryant (2011) point to change coming from 'professionals and elected representatives in consultation with local groups', the participants point to their roles as striving to engage with people in communities in ways that create possibilities for influence whilst simultaneously engaging decision makers in ways that encourages their receptiveness to community influence. They therefore present this as a complex, multi-faceted partnership process that engages with power dynamics, rather than a limited, hierarchical dynamic of consultation.

LA – And we're told to work with people in the most deprived areas, to target work there and so there can't help but be a power dynamic. People have had a dead good opportunity to be involved [though].

T – It's aboot supporting people to take the initiative. It's the infrastructure around community planning that allows people to contribute.

LA – Yeah.

T – But we're protected because we don't do cooking classes where the power dynamics get hidden because they are showing people what to do. Oor job is aboot ideas. The power dynamic is constantly negotiated, and in that sense it's naked. Ideas are bubbling around, and people grasp it.

LA – People put in a lot of time and effort. I get paid but there are loads of activists, they don't get paid.

Meekosha *et al* (2016:152) challenge community workers to be able to 'combine a critical analysis of power and inequality with openness to the strengths and assets of marginalised communities'. The participants' expressed awareness of power differences that are integral to partnerships made up of service providers with paid authority and community members with unpaid legitimacy that comes from their lived experience of poverty and inequalities, is significant. The notion of power dynamics being visible and negotiated comes from a place that is embedded in a values-based approach that demonstrates a grappling with different elements of power including a structural analysis (Ledwith 2016). Notably, they emphasise their awareness of power imbalances as one of the specific limitations and challenges of policy-led partnership working, but they also point to visibility of this and particularly the community members' awareness of this dynamic.

Whilst Gaventa (2006) points to the contested nature and shifting meanings of power dynamics as being central to community engagement, the participants are equally reflective of the complex path they tread working with a dynamic that has a striving for equity at its core. In some ways reminiscent of Foucault's (1991) power as discourse, the notion of ideas bubbling around in a dynamic where they claim power is naked, is therefore an interesting one.

There is recognition of the privileged, paid, position the participants occupy alongside the responsibilities that come with developing relationships with people in communities that create expectations. That said, the challenges of building up relationships of trust over time

and being committed to 'doing your best for local people' come with the parallel requirement to do your best as a Council employee and the two are not always obviously compatible.

LA - …when you have been working in a community for a while and getting to know local people and local people are very accepting of you and, you know, you've got quite a privileged position coz people really trust you and providing you are working with people, people really trust you and they trust that you are doing the best for them…What I find dead interesting now is that it's a long time since I've seen…local people [are] getting behind movements that are often against what the City Council are doing, do you know what I mean? They are appearing at things that we would typically campaign on in the past…people are starting to show up [again] and starting to let their voices be heard, which I find quite encouraging.

T – …maybe the experience prior to the broadly ten years of community planning, I dae ken if it's ten years might be twelve, but you know what I mean, decade of community planning that we've been involved. So, folk used to be more like that, didn't they? And what's important is that to some extent community planning was the response to that.

LA – Do you think we've just put them in the box, the community planning box, rather than having, do you know what I mean?

T – Em…

LA – So people were responsive to change or action or whatever and they were active, but it wisnae manageable for us, I don't mean you T or me, but people that have bigger wages than us. What they've done is said 'I know what we'll do, we'll give them that opportunity but we're going to put it in this tidy wee box called 'partnership working'.

T – Yeah, no that's exactly what happened. A New Life for Urban Scotland, Tory plan wasn't it? And then Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIP) and then Community Planning Partnerships - and there was maybe another couple in between depending on which political party was in

charge…just change the name – [they] were about reaching accommodation where folk would be offered partnership in return for being a wee bit less hostile or less connected movements. And I think in [City] on one level that was maybe okay because…part of our role was to support people to 'support people', how condescending, but anyway to support people to see what they were getting into. Despite, I mean we had really very long discussions at the start, long discussions about the meaning of partnership, coz folk were like 'this isnae partnership'.

LA – Yeah, and maybe what they didnae articulate but what they were feeling, I think, was 'how could it be partnership when we hae different levels of power?' But in spite of that, folk were in terms of community engagement no bad: 'it gies us access to some resources at least for wur community'. But they were wise, you know. It was a trade-off.

T – Yeah, it wiz a trade-off.

J – But a sense that people weren't stupid and could see that?

T – Folk werenae stupid and could see that and… remember we were speaking a long time ago about big SIP and wee SIP and folk had influence over small grants by that we mean you know £0-£50000, it wiz no insignificant, but [they] didnae have control over projects of a million or bits beyond that…but it's dead interesting what you were saying LA that folk are beginning to merge and make connections with movements again at the same time that I'm detecting that there's a degree of redundancy around community planning [from managers]. You know and if you didnae know about it you'd see those as two disconnected things but in reality, I don't think that they are.

J – In what way do you mean? They are moving away from community planning, they are getting towards movements, are they…?

T – Eh, the same folk that would spend their time supporting the out of school clubs and youth work or whatever are now popping up at the events that are saying 'what about the cuts to the Council budget'. Would that be fair?

LA – Yes, I think so.

T – And the good thing is they dinnae see those two roles as, well maybe the same, as contradictory. But no to the extent that one stops them from doing the other.

Cornwall's (2008:283) thoughts on invited spaces are useful in thinking about the different faces of power and influence with regards to community partnerships. She points to the possibility that invited seats at the table come with other challenges that 'may have further costs to democratic vitality' and goes on to warn that taking up these roles come with the requirement to speak to power (service providers and policy makers) in what are deemed as acceptable ways to them. This she suggests is because much as the partnerships have been designed based on a Foucault influenced perspective of power as fluid (Foucault 1980), they are actually spaces that the state invites communities into rather than spaces defined by communities. Lukes' (2004) thoughts on this are illuminative as he highlights the power to discuss and influence in partnership is tinged with the power behind what is held as non-negotiable. This means that from the outset, there is an imbalance in bargaining powers and therefore an imbalance in power (Jones 2003).

The participants' reflections reveal the subtleties and complexities of this in relation to different aspects of their roles and go right down to who gets paid for community engagement. However, their consistent respect for local people's perspectives and agency reveals an attitude that both understands and esteems the complexity of local people's engagement as they straddle both partnership-working and activism.

Evidently, the dialogue moves from the power and strength of partnership working to analysing the nature and intentions of this as an approach. Reflecting on the political drivers and policy directives, the participants clearly discuss some of the limitations of this approach

to practice. Drawing from Scott's (2012) analysis of community planning, Shaw's (2017:2) thoughts certainly add to this debate as she questions whether community planning:

> encourages and supports democratic participation or whether there is a danger that it actually does the opposite in silencing or even extinguishing local democracy.

Relatedly, Emejulu (2011:126) criticises practice for what she considers an essential flaw at its core, namely the inadvertent creation of an othering process, describing community development as:

> a highly problematic discourse and social practice because it (re)produces unequal and undemocratic identity constructions…[and] rather than community development being a transformative process of progressive social change, oftentimes it is a process of professionals subjecting local people to patronizing and undemocratic ideas, language and practices.

It could be easy to take both Shaw's and Emejulu's concerns as the guiding measure and use them to conclude a surface level analysis: government policies are espousing directives, community workers are responding, and people in communities are passive victims of unthinking undemocratic practice. However, there is something much more sophisticated going on here because this dialogue, in its depth of reflexivity, demonstrates an understanding of all these dilemmas. The participants reflect on time being spent discussing what partnership is, the dynamics of working together, acknowledging mistrust and power dynamics: *how can this be a partnership when they have more power*? What is important is that these reflections are consistently grounded in respect for the agency of people in communities. In other words, there is indeed little sense of the participants entering

communities as ‘professionals’ who unthinkingly impose government directives, and this level of critically aware practice is an important cog in their approach.

Whilst recognising and acknowledging the existence of these dilemmas the participants are also suggesting that such a simple dichotomy is not necessarily at play here: *they were wise you know. It wiz a trade-off.* Thus Emejulu’s (2015:87-88) subsequent contention that an empowerment discourse in community development constructs local people as ‘active and competent agents’ is more readily evident in this dialogue. That said, the participants’ reflections reveal a questioning of the very nature of partnership working, on some levels, as they also acknowledge possibilities that community planning has kept community engagement neat and tidy:

LA – That’s why I was saying about the community planning, coz for me if you think way back in [area] or anywhere else, it wasn’t as neat and tidy.

T – No.

LA – Community planning was like landscaping an overrun garden and we were able to put things in the right place…make it easy for people. Whereas previous you know, you remember campaigns?

T – Yeah, yeah housing campaigns.

LA – Yeah! Or this closing down and that closing down, and the motivation that people had, or the passion, coz there wasn’t a neat place for them to go, there wasn’t a bit of landscaped community planning.

T – Well yeah.

J – Does that connect with what you were saying about ‘in the box’?

LA – Yeah, the way I see it I've got a picture of my garden out there in the front and what people all want in different places and I just want to tidy it up and make it all neat, just leave it and let it flourish itself! What do you think people would say if, I know what they'll say, I know what some people will say: 'I like to be sitting round the table and I like the fact that somebody who has got some kind of position of power is listening to, you know, what is coming out the community that's getting heard somewhere'. That's what some people will say coz it's neat and tidy…

Their reflections on their ongoing dialogue with people in communities lead them to conclude that on balance their approaches to community planning generate positive processes that create opportunities for communities that would probably not happen otherwise. However, there is an important thread here that points to the desire for basic equality that Rancière (2001) refers to. It is not surprising that people in communities who are involved in committees might not want to lose that.

T – Folk say that we'd rather hae what we've got, we might want more but we'd rather hae what we've got. This building [the community centre] wouldnae exist if it wisnae for the community planning partnership.

LA – I got the director of finance to be the chair [of the partnership] and we managed to secure the funding!

The 'neat and tidy' clearly gets certain results for, and importantly with, people in the communities, however the dilemmas inherent to that approach are evident throughout the participants' dialogue. The highly critical, reflective considerations of power dynamics and contradictions of practice reveal thoughtful, engaged, respectful approaches. Indeed, there is a sense of a Rancièrean (1997) foundation in their drive for equal footings round the

partnership table. The opportunities that partnership discourse created are highlighted as impactful on some levels, but noticeably as invited spaces, and the creeping acknowledgement of the need to move to claim spaces (Gaventa 2006) is equally seen as a significant part of their roles.

Creating space and building alliances

The words of a community activist from North Edinburgh, Scotland, articulate some elements of the inherent challenges to community development that the participants are grappling with, as she refers to community planning and suggests that:

> Ironically, the policy to promote community engagement and community participation in local communities, appears to have contributed to a decline in community activism in our area… activists [were concerned] about the numbers of meetings they were being expected to attend which left them with very little time to participate in grass-roots initiatives. Today it's much harder to get to, and debate with, the real decision makers (Blaikie, cited in Shaw 2011:2).

Continually reflecting on their values-led approach during the dialogue, the participants challenge their own representation of their work and move on to expand the focus of the dialogue from the immediacy of the role as defined by the policy directives to the more nuanced approach that community development demands. Consequently, they clearly present their roles as being part of community planning and more, and this framing allows them to navigate in and beyond policy directives to engage with broader participatory democratic processes (Ledwith 2020; Shaw 2016).

Another contested concept, Blee's (2012) analysis of democratic process, as she writes about activist groups and democracy-making, is useful here. She highlights the common flaw of simply equating democracy with governance and voting; and points to the many contradictions apparent in democratic governments around the world as they engage in activities such as surveillance and secrecy. More relevant to this research however she goes on to suggest that such definitions devalue the 'democratising effects of grassroots political action' that is democracy practiced in a different, but no less important, way (2012:4). This is an ongoing process, she continues, that involves people in communities dialoguing and acting together to try to transform society, a central part of community development.

The participants recognise this, and they acknowledge the positives, the motivation and the passion that campaigning, or making connections with movements, can bring, as a collective process. There is a sense of Ledwith's words ringing true here, as she states that:

> Democratic values of respect, dignity, reciprocity, and mutuality together form a practical framework for checking the validity of everything we do in the name of community development (Ledwith, 2005:3).

Ultimately, the participants engage with the formal partnerships, but their critical reflection grounded in these values ensures their work is not confined to that and they therefore notice and engage with community activists more broadly. They fully recognise the work of community activists that 'reinvigorates the sense that what ordinary citizens do matters' (Blee 2012:134).

LA - … it's not always neat and tidy [though].

T – It's not always neat and tidy but the stuff you've done about the relocation of the prison here, was that neat and tidy?

LA – It was very neat and tidy! So, we have a new [community prison] and there was a massive groundswell of public opinion against it, not to the [community prison] per say but 'why do you dump everything here in the [name of area]?' So people just got themselves organised to do petitions and [it was] a huge learning curve for people: they attended committee, raised their objections and all this sort of thing, attended public meetings, put their points across, whilst you know in the background a feeling of this is a done deal. And for me I'm sitting there thinking 'somebody's already signed the papers, it's happening anyway'.

J – It's happening anyway?

LA – Yeah. So, people [were] really against it: 'please put it somewhere else…'. So, of course it goes through planning and ends up here.

J – What was the opposition?

LA - …if you are putting [people] in there that have any kind of drug issue and they've got liberty to get out and about and all this sort of thing, the temptation [is] there, you're setting people up to fail. So [people said] 'we have the homeless unit, we have supported accommodation, we have issues with drugs…why is it you feel the need to put it right in the heart of our community, rather than somewhere else?' And the reasons for doing it are dead valid, you know they want it in a community where people can get visitors…can see the children and all this sort of thing so…

T – But the response to that fell oot the side o' community planning. It wisnae held tidy within the…

LA – It wisnae held tidy.

J – How did it fall out the side, what do you mean?

LA – …it came from nowhere, it came like welfare rights, welfare reform, it came in like that and the response to it, the response to the issues that people were raising in the community wasn't held within the community planning partnerships, is that what you mean?

T – So people created petitions …

LA – So outwith, but, but they went and did all that themselves, we supported some of them, but the most part they did it themselves, I didn't go to committee and say this is the objections from the community, they went and talked to it, they knew what to do. I might put them in touch with people who could advise on 'this is how you write an objection or this is what you need to say' you only get so many, but that was all their doing, that was all their learning. That wasn't, the partnership only hosted the debate, hosted the public meeting and that sort of thing. A huge learning curve for people.

J – That's educational is it not? (reflecting on an earlier comment).

LA – It is education and a huge disappointment, frustrating.

T – But, but, but there's the functional learning about daen this stuff which I would argue was made easier because people had been involved in other things and knew each other.

LA – Some.

T – Some, you know, but [they] built alliances with people in the community that had never been involved.

LA – And built alliances with people that used to be involved years ago.

T – Uhu, so there's that learning about what are we doing, and how to write petitions, and how do you get a delegation to the Licensing Committee? But what aboot the learning that's aboot why were we told we could hae a partnership and work in conjunction wi agencies but when it's something bigger we're told 'well nah your opinion is not really that important'.

Gaventa's (2006) thoughts on closed spaces of power come alive here as the decision about the community prison was in effect taken behind closed doors. Building from Martin's (2003) perspectives, Shaw (2007:27) points to the relationship between 'agency and structure', suggesting that there needs to be awareness that actions must be 'mediated through relations of power' because 'autonomy is always constrained by the dialectics of control'. The community worker has the choice of working within these constraints and assuming the ameliorative role of social control, or indeed, as Shaw suggests, of undertaking more 'radical versions' and striving to challenge, expose and transform the 'structures and relations of power which systematically marginalize and exclude' (*ibid*).

The participants reflect on these tensions and challenges, representing them as an ordinary but complicated, ongoing part of their role. The challenge of different community needs being expressed, the clash that comes from decisions being imposed by community planning partners, the challenge to democratic process and the consistent acknowledgement that people in communities are of course cognisant of this, they are not stupid. Meekosha *et al's* (2016) perspective that the community development worker is tasked with combining the ability to critique power and inequality with a respect for marginalised communities' strengths goes some way to capturing this dynamic. Treading the ever-present risk of homogenous references to communities, the participants take this further and suggest that people in communities also engage in this way.

The concept of 'falling out the side of community planning' is important. Reflecting on community planning, Scott (2012:6) states that:

> in originating from an agenda framed by predetermined national outcomes and performance indicators, community participants in these spaces may have little opportunity to contribute to theorising the problems or the desired solutions.

However, if we acknowledge that 'people are not stupid', as the participants consistently do, there is space for more dynamic action to take place and respond to. In other words, whilst this may be the case if community development workers and local people confine themselves to the 'tidy box' of community planning partnerships, what we see in this dialogue is that more complex dynamic processes are at play and this is important. The community planning partnership therefore ought not to be represented as a 'single story' (Adichie 2009) with sitting round the table the only viable option for participation or indeed participatory democracy.

The framing of learning as political process is also central to this, with elements of Freire's concept of conscientisation (2016) and Gramsci's organic intellectuals (1986) visible. Specifically, the 'Gramscian-Freirean belief in the infinite capacity of people to think and act on their own behalf' (Ledwith 2001:177) is driving their practice and this is key. Some further words from Blaikie (cited in Shaw 2011:17) are useful here:

> We need to remind ourselves how capable we are as a community. We are organisers, campaigners and people with knowledge, experience and skills… In the past we had the confidence to take on the establishment when we were unhappy about things and we can do that again.

With *people arnae stupid* the prevailing attitude throughout, or the Gramscian-Freirean trust in people's agency, the participants in this dialogue do not need reminding how capable

people in communities are. However, they are simultaneously aware of structures, processes and decisions being made that diminish people's circumstances and opportunities.

T - In our area, something that was maybe a wee bit more mundane was the potential withdrawal of a bus route. And so, the community planning will say something aboot 'improving transport links between the outer areas and the inner areas' and…

LA – And then the private buses come along and say, 'ah we're just moving that'.

T – Yeah and so older people, older women predominantly, say no 'that's no the way it works' and I dinnae think they actually literally sat doon in the middle of the road but they done everything else coz they were like 'nah you jist mak up the rules so you can get what you want'. It took them years by the way, but they've got a compromise.

J – They managed to stop the route being withdrawn, or to get it back?

T – To get it back.

LA – No but it started a movement across the city where they were meeting with everybody and pulling stuff together, so it wasn't just [local people here], that started a change, a groundswell.

T – Well, the point you make, the point you make is important. They started defining themselves as pensioners rather than people from a geographic area. And that definition as pensioners, although it wisnae exclusive - alliances [were] made wi folk wi disabilities and that were different ages - it wiz aboot moving oot o the definitions we'd give them and folk creating their ane.

The participants refer to the people they are working alongside in communities as 'local people' and acknowledging that this can be criticised for limited homogenous meanings is

important. However, the participants engage fully with people on diverse issues that affect their daily lives and Ife (2013) suggests that this very act of diverse active engagement facilitates participation from a diverse range of people in communities. Expanding on that, Meekosha *et al* (2016:150) conclude that the facilitation of active participation 'challenges assumptions that communities are homogeneous'.

The participants do indeed work alongside a diversity of people. That said, there is a strong sense of class consciousness evident throughout their dialogue on their practice (Shaw & Mayo 2016) with an adherence to Alcock's (2006) definition of poverty as a political problem that is unevenly distributed in society and inextricably linked to protected characteristics. To labour a point, whilst recognising the existence of discriminatory attitudes, there is no sense of the participants displaying any perspective that sits alongside the notion that:

> When you live in long-term poverty, you have to depend on services that are delivered with suspicion and disdain. They make you feel humiliated. The media and politicians speak about the poor in derogatory ways when they use terms like 'lazy', 'scroungers', 'feckless parents' and 'underclass'. The stereotyping of all poor people dehumanises them in the eyes of others (Kathy cited in Green 2007).

The participants in this dialogue recognise the experiences detailed above as common and strive to influence for positive social change along with people in communities, service providers and policy makers. Their dialogue is noticeably grounded in respect for people in communities, avoiding stereotyping, stigma, and disdain. Recognising how stigma reveals how 'power etches itself on people as a means of dehumanising and devaluing them' (Tyler 2020:260), the participants' dialogue reveals actions and attitudes determined to counter

that. This is the obvious and enduring culture of their practice that is revealed in the dialogue.

Bryant and Bryant (2011:143) note that one of the significant strengths of this kind of building of community alliances is that it encourages people into collective action who are often otherwise 'excluded or alienated from any organised form of political activity'. Furthermore, Foley (1999) highlights the learning process activists experience in relation to their involvement in activism and social campaigning. This is all of relevance to the participants' perspectives on the bus campaign, however there is more to consider here as Checkoway (2009:5) surmises that if:

> democracy is about the participation of the people, and if the people are becoming more diverse, then the future of democracy is inseparable from its diversity. If community change is essential to a democratic society, then its future is inseparable from the diverse democracy in which it operates.

By building 'solidarity from a vantage point of…differences', older women started a groundswell of movement across the city and got the bus route re-instated (Meekosha 1993:189). Women, community, and the acts of 'stitching the threads of everyday life together' (Dominelli 1995:133) is revealed in its timelessness as the pivotal role of women in community building and organising across difference and similarities is highlighted.

Lorde (2019:31) speaks of 'Kujichagulia' as a term for self-determination or:

> the decision to define ourselves, name ourselves and speak for ourselves, instead of being defined and spoken for by others

There is much to learn from that. Relatedly, Kenny (2016:49) suggests that falling into external service provision type approaches to community work inevitably involve speaking for people in communities, or setting agendas for people, and this in turn acts to 'undermine community self-determination'. In this context, T's comment that people stepped out of definitions that were given to them is profoundly important on many levels. With similarities to hooks' (1989) challenge not to step into others' spaces and to voice for them, Batsleer and Humphries (2000:15) warn that any: 'claim to knowledge about others is a claim to power in relation to them, for good or ill' and the participants are consistently and ordinarily emphasising this throughout the dialogue. Batsleer and Humphries continue:

> The power lies in part in the capacity to define, analyse and name - even bring into being - human populations and to establish, through these claims to knowledge, systems of control of those populations' (*ibid*).

Meekosha *et al* (2016:151) point to the role of the community worker in cooperating for such 'fragmentation to be resisted' and the participants reflect further on this in their roles.

LA – That was a good campaign.

J – So were you involved in that then?

T – Yeah.

J – In what way?

T – I dinnae ken.

LA – Booking the rooms! It started in T's [geographical area] and here I was speaking to someone on [name of street] whose husband was getting chemotherapy, and because the bus route had been taken off [street name] she had to spend something like £16 a day getting to and from [hospital]…

T – Mhmnn.

LA - …you know stuff like that that…so again it was just like, 'well there's a campaign going on about removing buses from here'.

T – Yeah.

LA – '*Let's get the people out, let's join, eh, let's book a room and see if [service providers] will come and speak to you and hear it…*'*…creating the opportunity for people to say what's going to be wrong:* '*if you do this, this is the impact'.*

T – Yeah.

LA – That's big and it seems like common sense but often people [service providers] dinnae think o' that.

T – Your question Jean about what was my role, and LA's response, important response, aboot booking the rooms. So, we do book rooms, and I wouldnae want to play doon the significance o' that. I think we also create space. So, we've all had experience of booking rooms and naebody turns up but the strange experience where you do book rooms and…

LA – You've no got enough chairs, I've done that!

T – The reason you get to an overspill is because of the relevance o' the issue. In terms of the bus campaign, I think I chaired some o' the meetings which is putting your head above, putting your head on the block…

LA – So within partnership/community planning, or not?

T – Eh, to use the argument that community planning was about local communities across the [different areas of the city] and smaller communities. But there's oddly community

planning at a city level as well. And one of the things that we used to get told was that we weren't being strategic enough, but to use that to say 'yes this is a bus service for this specific area' but it is also about social isolation and that bit in the community plan for the city. And therefore, it's no illegitimate to try and chair that discussion and in this case [with name] bus company and [council manager] of these worlds. And on the day, it probably didnae resolve very much but people knew then who the targets were. So, there's that stuff, isn't there?...

J – Can I just check before you do move on?

T – Yeah

J – …so there's something there about that kind of fine line between putting your head up if you are a council employee and you are actually working with people who are campaigning against council decisions, but you can frame that (and you need to be really quite astute to frame that, within the policy developments to enable yourself to do that) using the community planning process to enable that?

T – You need to be alive to it and you need to be a wee bit astute, but you would think it would be…

LA – Common sense.

T - Part of your job, eh?

LA – Aye you would.

T – But it disnae always happen to be fair…

J - …quite often folk stop before doing that, for whatever reason?

T – Yeah but I just think that's where the fun starts I sit aboot sometimes for three years waiting for that to happen.

Bussu and Bartels' (2013: 3) thoughts on facilitative leadership as a process of dialoguing for finding agreement and ultimately 'serving rather than steering' is made more likely through creating spaces for conversations and actions. In this way what may seem like a simple act of booking rooms takes on significance in its power as a catalyst for engagement, action and ultimately potentially for engaging democratic process. Reflecting some of Alinski's (1971) perspectives the participants stress that the response from people in communities will depend entirely on the relevance of the issue to them. Evidently, this requires the ability to avoid imposing pre-planned agendas prioritised by others that ultimately often result in accusations of apathy and non-engagement (*ibid*).

This is a demonstration of holding an awareness of the 'personal is political' rather than an individual lens (Mayo 2017). These are particular conversations, that are grounded in dialogue and that involve a willingness to move forwards in action that is grounded in a hope for positive changes and an intention to work together to build alliances and strive for them (Ledwith 2016). Sometimes the results are the positive changes the communities desire and sometimes they are not but framing this as creating space and building alliances, the participants demonstrate this kind of intention must unstintingly stay as an ongoing part of their conscious intent (Gilchrist 2019). There is also a sense of Blee's (2012:134) words ringing true here, on how activism:

> creates space in civic life for ideas and actions that exist nowhere else, encouraging people to envision how the world can be transformed into something better (Blee 2012:134).

Ultimately, the dialogue reveals a hopeful perspective grounded in thinking that trusts people's abilities to act.

Contradictory space and intriguing dilemmas

Deliberating the nature of community development, Shaw and Mayo (2010:3) suggest that: 'historically it has been deployed to both address inequality and to mask its causes'. Drawing from the colonial history of community development, Mayo (2011:75) points to the grounding both in 'principles of metropolitan self-interest as well as benevolent paternalism' with a 'dual mandate to 'civilise' while exploiting', strong words indeed. With the resulting hybrid practice still evident today, the participants acknowledge they are operating within a contradictory space whilst making their own sense of their roles.

LA – I call myself a community worker because I think community development, I mean there were community development workers that came here, they were American, and they came to 'save the poor'. That's not what we're about.

J – So kind of like a missionaries-type approach?

LA – Yeah. I think that community development, that's not how I measure it or the people I work with, community development is the product, I think.

T – I think community development is about process and product together.

LA – The way I think about it is that community work is happening all the time and community development emerges and doesn't happen all the time.

This brief dialogue demonstrates one of the central dilemmas around meanings of community development practice, once again demonstrating its contested nature. LA talks of her role as community worker preferring it to the representation of community development she thinks of as an attitude of saving the poor by encouraging them to use their own initiative to change their own attitudes (Biddle and Biddle 1964), or the kind of ameliorative practice

that led to the ‘community psycho-therapy’ label coined by Miller and Hein (1974). It is worthy of note that the participants are equally troubled by the framing of the community worker as saviour as they are of Emejulu and Bronstein’s (2011:284) contention that being part of:

> governance structures, service provision and technical approaches to addressing poverty and exclusion…simultaneously reduce independence of voice…and freedom of spaces outside the state and the market for formulating critiques and mobilizing groups for action.

They respond to this, fully aware of the dilemmas inherent to their roles and the challenges that come from governance and this is important. They discuss the need for their practice to be a free-flowing process and led by the issues raised in dialogue with people in communities, not imposed but respectfully negotiated, both inside and outside of formal planning structures, akin to what Craig (2011:275) describes as ‘democratic dialogues’.

This requires the ability to flow with people and to see where it takes you and is undoubtedly a key defining feature of community development practice (Gilchrist & Taylor 2011). Notwithstanding the concerns about meanings, the participants do refer to their practice as community development during the dialogue, as well as community work. It is clear however that their interpretation sits far from the patronising, limited behaviour change approach described by Biddle and Biddle above (1964).

More relevant to them than contested meanings, they note what they call diversions that challenge their approach. They fear the potential for the free-flowing nature of their practice to be lost in a management diktat to monitor it in a simplistic numerical manner.

T - …but there's big diversions …whether that's aboot counting things or aboot daen lovely things.

J – Diversions that come…down?

LA – That are just to derail you or take you off the track.

T – The one that's coming down and that has been ramped up is what LA was referring to in terms of [the monitoring system] …but there's an attempt to…

LA – Quantify it.

T – and so…we were hearing yesterday, somebody was saying: 'how could you be working with somebody for X period of time and not know their name?' or 'how could you be working with somebody for X period of time and not know their date of birth or their address?' and I'm like 'well whit's that got to dae with it? I wiz just working wi the bus campaign, saying c'mon we'll mak a placard and we'll go to the right meeting'. You dinnae, I didnae need to know their names…

LA – …yes, we do! Yeah… [they're saying:] 'if you are working with a group and you have been for a couple of years or so, unless you know their names you shouldn't be working with them'.

T – And, and there's a version where of course it's right, that maybe you should be better at record keeping, that's a totally valid thing to raise. And there's a version that says that the work should be shaped and sized before you even attempt to do it which limits your capacity to move quickly as a community worker.

J – How do you shape and size community development before you do it?

T – Well there's a version that says you should plan, assess, implement, da, da, da, da, and okay we would probably agree wi that, but it's beginning to manifest itself now that you would ask everyone to fill in their 'learner details' form before they got in the door or before you had a discussion.

J – People in communities?

T – Aye

LA – Mhmm …it's becoming very prescriptive, eh? 'This is how you do community development…'

T – Yeah, because it's not about community development it's service delivery - so 'how could you have a transactional relationship wi somebody withoot knowing what their requirement is?'

J – You can't have a service delivery relationship with someone without knowing…

T – No, no particularly if it's going to be monitored, then…

LA – We have a one size fits all [monitoring process] whether it's youth work, adult learning, community development…community capacity building, and it disnae really fit us.

T - I mean there's other examples and they're no always combative but one of the examples about good bits of work, the campaign relating to the custody unit or the campaign to reinstate the bus route was you dinnae actually know where the edges are and that's one of the strengths, isn't it? So there's maybe a core and you might get to know them really well and there might be six o' them but…the community's approach for organising is good, [so] you winnae know the sixty people that turn up, you certainly winnae know the six hundred that they speak tae. But: 'if you could get all their names and addresses and postcodes and email addresses beforehand and put them on a machine you would be able to dae all that, in fact you <u>have</u> to dae all that'. It becomes…so if folk have been hesitant to get involved in the past, there's a danger they become even more hesitant in the future because we are being told actually the priority isn't the community engagement and certainly isnae the community development, it's setting up potential customers.

LA – Yeah, yeah.

T – And, and, and maybe I'm overstating it slightly, but only slightly.

LA – I don't think you are, and I could understand, eh, so this has come in via…our management systems haven't been great in the past and various inspections have picked up on it.

J – Management systems?

LA – Yeah, it's basically a management system for proving that we work with people, whatever that looks like, but it only picks up on numbers.

T – Coz development is about the individual and learning is a single fact that can be commodified.

J – How did that come about then?

T – I dae ken, load o' nonsense.

LA - Load o' nonsense.

T – Na, na, to be fair it's borrowed from other traditions that are about signing people up for language classes or swimming lessons or …you know, which is all fair enough. But it's no my job!

LA – It's not only that, it's the Council's a huge machine, isn't it, a lot of people probably fail to understand what we do and when it comes to setting budgets somebody further up the chain is trying to prove what we do.

J – Prove the worth?

LA – And it's difficult to prove the worth by saying: 'well this campaign to stop the prison being built here…', it's difficult to say: 'well it's been fifteen hundred people or whatever, that have been involved in such and such'. So that's unfortunate in terms of what it means for the service in the future.

J – So potentially that system of keeping a note and counting is being done in a way that individualises and turns things into a note of service provision rather than a note of community development participation, community engagement towards change?

LA – Mhmn, mhmn, which is very sad.

J – So what it sounds like is it is only pushing up the agenda aspects of community work that lend much closer to the service provision style?

T – Yeah, yeah.

LA – Yeah.

J - And further away from community development, community campaigning. A [monitoring system] can do that?

LA – …it can cause enough frustration amongst workers that…unfortunately what it's going to do is focus people who are working in community development to have this at the back of their head when they are working with people, you know what I mean? 'What's this going to look like 6 months down the line, is this a group that I'm going to be working with, is this a campaign, or is this what?' It's going to influence how people are working…and if it means something horrible for the service in terms of, you know that you're not valued as a service in terms of cuts, is that going to allow communities to grow, you know their potential to grow when there's nobody there to support it?…when there's no table for people to go round, to sit at, is that going to cause people to grow? You know when you take it away and they've got no option, I don't know, I don't know.

T – Mhmn, mhmn.

LA –…we do really good work and we have got a history of doing good work in terms of engagement with communities: 'because we do! We're probably some of the most resistant to some of the changes eh, you know.

T – Which we? I am personally, that's just coz I'm auld fashioned.

J – Sounds like it's a bit more than old fashioned?

LA – …I think that the way things are going is short sighted, we're not putting value and resources into things that matter, and I think that people [management] cannae see that and you get frustrated at that.

T – I mean, HMIE…some of that's about being safe and some is proving to other people how safe we are 'look how tame we can make things' [HMIE is Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education].

Not knowing where the edges are is one of the key strengths of community development process because it means a dynamic is created where the community worker is not in control of everything, need not be and more so, must not be. Scott (2012:3) laments that the freedom that community development practice needs in this way is often unfortunately disciplined 'by national systems of monitoring and reporting'. The challenge the participants point to here is in seeing and acting beyond these limitations. Furthermore, the dilemmas they face are not grounded in any lack of critical thinking, theoretically driven practice or reflection, rather in the challenge that working 'for the state' means that they have to 'find ways to simultaneously work in and against it at both central and local levels' (Cockburn 1977 cited in Craig 2016:49).

This is compounded by what Giroux (2012:57) refers to as the:

> neoliberal fervour for unbridled individualism, [that is] almost pathological in its disdain for community, public values, and the public good.

The impact of dominant neoliberal ideology in the global West has resulted in market driven welfare provision, contracted-out services and business models that demand 'paper trails of achievement and successes that bear little relationship to real events taking place on the ground' (Fraser 2008:5). There is a sense of frustration from the participants as they reflect

on the management imposed, individualised monitoring system that has ironically been designed to prove the worth of the community work. As a basic reminder, Beck and Purcell (2010:14) call for practice that sees people for who they are and not simply as 'statistical objects'. The sense of frustration is compounded by their depth of understanding around the limitations of such an approach and the dangers it poses for community development practice.

LA – There's a campaign on just now in [place name]…So the [community centre burned down] and the group want the Council to build a new one, the Council dinnae have the money to build a new one so they've given them a couple of options. Who developed the options?

T – The Council.

LA – Yeah, naebody was privy to the discussion, they've leafletted everybody in the area saying vote on it. So, people are upset, eh?

T – There's a big arrow pointing at the option you are meant to pick.

LA – Yeah, people are dead upset, really upset – an arrow on a fiver.

T – And, our role in terms of proving ourselves to HMIE would be how well that process was nursed.

J – Yes, for the right answers?

T – Yeah and how well we took people along towards the right answer without upsetting them too much – look there are only so many choices, it's better than nothing, blah, blah, blah. And we've just said we've done some o' that, some version o' that in the past and are doing some version o' that just now, so I'm no being critical o' colleagues in doing that. Um the new enthusiasm for [monitoring system] means you've got to say to somebody, 'could you please put that brick down, don't throw it at me and help fill in your form with your

postcode?' You know? So, you could see the ridiculousness of the situation. And the other dimension of everything [being monitored in this way] is some people will be saying 'the people that come along arnae valid, the people that express their opinion arnae valid, community groups arnae valid'.

As Shaw contends: 'If empowerment means reconciling people to powerlessness then this is an ultimate irony for community development' (2004:24). Indeed, the irony here is that the notion of the worthy and the unworthy, a dichotomy that persists in common parlance (Tyler 2013) is one of the central damaging concepts to people that community development practice strives to readdress (Ledwith 2020; Beck & Purcell 2010). Of course, the participants are fully alert to these dilemmas and alongside demonstrating one of the key aspects of their practice being in their attitudes to local people, they are also demonstrating the need to be fully aware of the hegemonic forces at play, including their roles in that.

T – Yeah and it's particularly upsetting because they are using some of the language of participatory budgeting tae push this agenda through, so the community development section along with the other bits of CLD are now connected closely with housing. Housing used to have a tradition of community engagement and participation [and] they've all but done away with that, all but done away with that, and have almost criminalised the people they've got left as problematic.

J – So [are there any] tenants campaigning…?

T – Nothing, none. LA's correct to the extent that folk fae the communities section go oot and knock people's doors and say: 'how much would you like your rent to go up?'

LA – Coz housing don't do it.

T – Coz housing have no contact, no contact with them. Service delivery in that context is mitigated by ourselves actually.

LA – So the argument from the housing [is]…in the past you used to need housing tenants' groups coz the houses were rubbish, housing was rubbish, but now they're saying 'it's good they dinnae have anything to complain about…or there's other means of getting your complaint heard'.

T – Complaint, complaint, not your participation – your democracy becomes your complaint!

LA – So what we've changed it to is we're looking at ideas. So, we have to do walk-a-bouts and stuff like that and that's what we do: 'come and have a walk-a-bout and let's see what we could do here'.

Davies (2015) warns of collaborations that result in ever diluted and ameliorative lowest common denominator approaches and the focus on complaints rather than democratic process relayed here is reminiscent of that. Engagement with housing service provision means the community workers are door knocking officially to discuss rents. However, as Ledwith (2007:9) contends: 'Principles of participatory democracy call for an understanding of power and discrimination at every stage of our practice' and they push against the lens that frames people as simple complainers. By developing conversations and relationships that engage tenants in dialogue on the realities of living in social housing, they find ways to '*see what we can do'* and open possibilities. This way they maintain practice that is grounded in dialogue and more likely to enable political and educational processes. They are however treading a complex and fine line.

Limitations to practice come in different guises and some of that is presented as an engagement with 'nice stuff' that stops before political process.

T – …I mean we talked about the big diversion fae the top as being pressure of counting and measuring and competing wi other people and proving yourself in the language or currency

of other people rather than your own, that's a pressure. But the other one is aw the nice stuff, the community festivals, the community newsletter [etc]. I think [it] needs examined because there's a version of that that is definitely kidding yourself on, it is just papering over the cracks. So, in our area we are doing a community arts project, painting old doors, but that wiz motivated by the fact that people couldnae do anything about the private sector in the areas, private sector tenancies, you know?

LA – It's good, I like that.

T – Em, I cannae remember now where we asked permission and where we didn't. So, we got to a stage where if we cannae get anything moving we'll go and paint it, so latterly…

LA – Dinnae tell anyone, you dinnae tell anybody that you do [it]?

T – I told the polis and I told [Council Head of Housing]. I said 'we're just going to paint it and if you dinnae like it we'll paint it grey, 6 months away noo'…

J – What do you mean?

LA – So you've got a tenement block and there's 8 flats in it and they're all owned by different landlords that live in Malta or somewhere like that and in order to paint the close, or the front, you need to get permission from all 8 of them. What I used to do to get around that was 'we're going to be painting the closey door if you object get in touch', put that letter through.

T – Yeah, yeah. So we've done similar with murals and the like, so it's aboot public space and that's owned either by the Council or somebody private and they are now taking the view that if we are no upsetting anybody too much we're just going to do it. And there's a very gentle version of that but there's also 'oh right, well aye, who owns what and where does the private stop and the public start?'

J – And is that part of the discussion?

T – Well it's aboot, it's aboot whits yer nice stuff for? And so we're doing stuff during [community festival] that relates to violence against women and there's an agenda there, a collective agenda there that we've been able to create space in and it is educational and it is political in a sense. ...but we're also doing something…which is about using [name of park] for folk to walk around wi their dogs and be nice to dogs. I don't think that's wur work and so last year I supported it, this year I'm leaving them to themselves. But it's no unimportant, it's kind o' building community. But what happens when you say oh it's about building community and then some posh fowk come and say oh that'd be great why do we no do da, da, da you know? There's an intriguing dilemma in that situation and that is if I turn up, I end up moving chairs aboot and stewarding and daen mundane things along wi people. Now that's maybe a criticism o' ma ain practice…so that's usually why I cannae count all the names and the like but whether you would want to as well!

The question of *whits yer nice stuff for*? is important in many ways and Ledwith's (2007:12) words provide the most telling answer to that when she stresses the need to:

> be vigilant and stay critical if we are to prevent our practice getting distracted and slipping into some feel-good, ameliorative, sticking plaster on the wounds of injustice.

It is possible and probable that the nice stuff T refers to falls into the ameliorative bracket, limited practice that can at best limit people to feeling a little better in the circumstances they are in, thus ultimately letting them down (Ledwith 2020; Craig 2016; Tyler 2013). In contrast to that, the focus on work that raises awareness of violence against women framed as a collective agenda that is educational and political has a very different essence.

Whilst fully acknowledging the historical limitations to feminist community work particularly in relation to intersectionality and the ongoing lessons to be learned, Dominelli (2006) points to the importance of violence against women being specifically highlighted from a 'personal is political' perspective grounded in an awareness of gender-based oppression. A focus on violence against women as a collective, educational political process and part of a community festival represents the kind of vigilant, critical practice Ledwith calls for above.

LA – …you know, I think the good stuff is not getting into [the monitoring system] is it?

T – Naw.

LA – It disnae, so the real thing that looks like it actually is [community] development isnae getting counted…it's not, it's because people [managers] dinnae want to count that, they just want the numbers, numbers of groups, number of people, numbers attending the festival, numbers of people.

J – So do you look at capturing that? Coz there's almost a danger that that's going to completely get side-lined, that community development & community action gets further side-lined.

LA – I think that we… when I think of the good bits that happen…

J – When you say the good bits, do you mean the campaigning, or…?

LA – I mean the campaigning or the fun bits or the bits where you see something positive happening. You know, you've gone on a journey or whatever… when I get an opportunity to think about that, it's only when I'm looking at something new. So [the city approach to participatory budgeting] … part of me is worried about this, [it] is meant to be under participatory budgeting, proper participatory budgeting, ideas generation.

T – Ideas generation, if you've got a computer!

LA – If you've got a computer but only on Council land – it's not going to work. So, anyway that's when I think 'what worked well, what would be good for this to do?' That's the times I reflect on it.

J – So when this comes up. Influencing how it's done?

LA – Yeah and I think about how we have done other stuff and what's been good and that's how I keep a very thin and shoogly trail on good pieces of work.

T – The recording should be back in the community, so community media (I would never use that phrase ordinarily) but community media, community newsletters, Facebook now, everything gets a photo now so there is a good side to social media.

LA – Yeah, I've got a collection of photos.

T – Yeah, so everything's there now, isn't it? They can just pull the legs fae underneath you, so you've got to contribute to some extent. I'm not against attempting to quantify what we do.

J – No, but it's about what you are quantifying?

T – …and it just occurred to me that maybe we should be talking to the dog walkers, coz maybe there'll be a day when we have to defend them digging up the park.

LA – I know. We had a campaign for toilets, public toilets in [place name] and dog walkers were a valuable contribution as were the skateboarders, kids, and families.

The dangers of a neoliberal-influenced monitoring system are symptomatic of the ongoing wider pressures on community development practice. The need for alternative ways of representing the real nature of the work and achievements is painfully evident. Credible alternative community-based ways of highlighting the impacts on people, communities, service provision and policy developments require democratic, values-led approaches. Gilchrist (2019) stresses the challenge in this is not only coming from the pressure of market-led evaluation approaches but also from the very nature of community development

as subtle, at times nebulous, practice. Ever reflective of the nature of their roles, the participants conclude the fine line they walk is difficult yet entertaining, challenging yet interesting, but always contradictory.

LA - …and the difficulty comes when you are walking a fine line, you know and T walks this line all the time, I'm surprised he's never fallen right off and done himself an injury... do you know what I mean, puts his head above the parapet, speaks at public meetings.

T - …you were talking aboot the weird role that we inhabit that's sometimes in the middle and what's really entertaining, I still find it entertaining, is when folk fae the community talk about the Council in your presence and say 'ah but no you' or 'I wisnae meaning [you]'…or 'them' ...that contradictory space is interesting.

Time, Commitment & Impact on Self

One of the distinctive aspects of this dialogue is that the participants have been working in the geographical communities for many years. Quite simply it is evident that community development is about building community and it is a long process that requires ongoing commitment.

T –… if radical community development, or community development, isnae very sure what it wants out of any event at any given time…sometimes building communities is [simply] about building community, isn't it? Sometimes we don't have a Machiavellian agenda!

LA – Yeah. I know, I know…we're lucky, I think we're still on the lucky side, not completely fallen off the edge, we're lucky in that we do have a certain bit of flexibility.

T – Yeah.

LA – … I'm speaking to you earlier saying I'm seeing a change in the move in local communities, I'm talking about the likes of [name] campaigning and stuff like that. Ten years ago, I would never have seen him with a placard at the city square about a budget cut... If we couldnae engage wi people or if we couldnae establish relationships wi people, we wouldn't be able to do our jobs. So that would be one way, the other way is sheer bafflement of my peers and other workers about what I do, that's one way. T's probably got a different way; he's probably got a much more theoretical way...

T – Well I think it's a totally heathy thing to maintain, that ambiguity about what your role is.

LA – Only coz it means we've got a certain amount of flexibility, so that when we are standing in front of somebody picketing and this sort of thing, they're thinking 'are you allowed to do that?' and you're saying 'well this is part of my job. I'm supporting communities'.

T – One by-product of things is being in a place for a wee while, and for a variety of reasons one of them being budget cuts, there's also a pressure rather than an enthusiasm to move people about and that maks it harder to build some of the connections that you are talking about… But when I was talking about the nice stuff it occurred to me that I used to do a lot of that myself but I dinnae do any of it anymore [the community group] do it and I support them to do it, but they dae it…

LA – Well T but I don't know ten years ago [the community group] weren't doing it all themselves.

T – Well that's what I'm saying aboot longevity, if you dinnae hae the same worker in the same area for a number of years, there's a danger that the worker ends up substituting themselves which is another diversion, isn't it? And I've done that loads by the way so again, it's not to be critical of people, and it's actually good to get beyond that but it takes a long time.

LA – It does take a long time.

J – …as things unfold, that unfolding, that takes time…coz that's a process?

LA – It is a process, they're looking for a progress, eh?

T – Yeah.

LA – So if I'm working with a specific group or whatever you know 'don't be working with them long-term unless there's some sort of progression there, in numbers'.

T – Yeah and the trends they are talking about are weeks and months, not years.

J – And in terms of [the community group], that's been years?

T – Ten years, is a good…

LA – …but looking back on that and seeing that progress, that's good, it's really good. I'm going to show the inspectors that if we get it!

J – What was that?

LA – We are just waiting to see where the next inspection is going to be, so I'm saying: 'remember and pull that out the hat when the inspectors come' coz we might get a joint one.

T – I use the notion of calendar much more than…ken it's taken me a wee while to learn that but over the last three, four, five years talk aboot the calendar. So, the annual calendar, when you say to people 'well remember you done that last year, so dinnae be feart aboot daen it, we'll just try and dae it a wee bit different this year'. So, there's year to year but also that, look this is what's happened over a ten year [period], there has been progress but…

LA – Look how far we've come!

Time, it takes time to build productive relationships and to notice and respond to inequalities. This is a challenging role and the participants acknowledge that the complex path they tread means they too need collective action and the chance to voice their concerns freely.

J – How do you work with this…how do you hold onto your values of working with people?

LA – We do this lot (puts head on table).

T – One of the by-products, is folk in our section are all in the union now and that wouldnae necessarily have been the case in the past.

LA - That is a by-product but it's not, I don't think it's only a by-product, I think it's eh, one way where people can voice freely what they're thinking about what's happening.

T – An alternative agenda, aye.

LA – There's a safety in that, eh, being able to say what we think's wrong without, we're not going to get punished or anything…

T – It creates a safety net.

LA – Yeah, having that safety is good, having that freedom is good.

T – …this is a help, speaking.

LA – Is it, do you feel better now?

J – Well I was wondering about the real sense of you two helping each other.

T – Can we do this every Friday? (Laughter)

There is a real sense of a strong, supportive relationship between the participants and this is important for them. Humour, care, recognition of each other's achievements alongside similar values and ontological perspectives creates a relationship that both nurtures them and feeds their politically driven approaches.

The power of critical reflection is also revealed by this dialogue. Apart from the good feeling the dialogue engendered, there is evidence throughout of thoughtful articulation that at once

reveals their practice, whilst it is simultaneously scrutinised by them and the result is a powerful meaning-making process.

Finally, just in case there were things left unsaid, I asked if there was anything else to say. The responses are revealing and certainly worthy of note:

J – Is there's anything else you'd like to put in?

LA – We're tired, eh.

J – Tired today or generally tired?

LA – Generally.

T – I'm struggling to be honest, but will get there…

LA – And do other people feel like that?

J – Yeah.

LA – Ok, that's a comfort.

J – …my sense of it is that other people feel like that… and then others don't hold onto the fight because it's too hard and they don't hold onto keeping putting your head up or…

T – See I don't know there's any choice.

LA – There isn't.

T – Yeah.

J - But not everyone stays with that…

LA – It is difficult, it is…and tiring…I know, I often think if it hadn't been about our involvement in unions and things like that, well I'm not speaking about you but me, I might have given up ghost.

J – Left?

LA – No and just toed the line and given up the fight, you know what I mean? I might have left…

J – There is a real sense of how hard it is actually to keep going, how hard it is to stay with community development process.

LA – It is but one of the good things is, despite being in the area for a long time, both of us have been in the same area for a long time, there's always a new thing that comes out and there's always a new group of people that you've never engaged with before and that's quite…

J – That's inspiring again?

LA – Yeah it is, so whilst we're doing, I can remember doing all the scary things that we hadnae done before, all the big public meetings and all these kind of things, [now its] 'ah I've done that before'. But there's always new, that's what keeps you going.

Messages from the dialogue

'When people stop speaking out, democracy dies' (Blaikie, cited in Shaw 2011:2). There is a consistent thread in this dialogue that emphasises the perspectives and experiences of people in communities with a very strong sense of the community workers being alongside them in striving to hold onto democratic process and agency. Blaikie's words are significant both in relation to the voice of the participants as well as those in the communities they are engaged with.

The participants are operating in a challenging space situated in and against the state that is often referred to in community development literature (Craig 2016; Cockburn 1977), however they never lose sight of their values and commitment to working alongside people in

communities in order to voice and take action on what is of import to them together. They are highly reflective, critical thinkers who are fully aware of dilemmas, challenges, and contradictions inherent to their roles. This, however, all comes at some cost, indeed they are noticeably tired, and they have had to secure places where they can voice their own concerns in supportive and protected spaces.

Their thinking is grounded in an understanding of social inequalities, power dynamics and stigma and they have an enduring awareness of the strength and critical capacities of people in communities both to take action, and to engage in democratic processes. This is community development as a commitment to bringing community perspectives to the fore in order to influence for positive social change. The subtleties of their practice and their engaged processes with people in communities bump up against neoliberal, market-led tangents and their reflections on the ensuing distractions are insightful. Much as Gaventa (2011:249) points to the role of 'community organisations, social movements, issue campaigns, and policy advocacy' in striving for people's voices to be heard and to have influence, the participants reveal practice that consistently strives for 'democratic politics and social change'. They see injustice, they see the contradictions of their employ, and they relentlessly and patiently look for opportunities, much as Ledwith (2007:10) contends that the community worker is tasked with critically engaging with:

> an analysis of power, of the structures of oppression in the world that reach into our communities and impact on personal lives.

The participants know this, and never refer to people in ways that pathologise them, never define them in relation to themselves, never define them in relation to service provision. There is evident respect and a sense of equity in their attitudes as they challenge their own

perspectives and reflect positively that people move out of definitions that they give them and create alliances across communities for change. The honest reflections reveal a critical ability that knows self-determination and knows democratic potential.

Reflections in the dialogue where the participants challenge and question each other and themselves reveal a commitment to being alert to the challenges that result in limited practice either inadvertently or intentionally. Notably they are prepared to acknowledge potential limitations of their own perspectives (am I kiddin' myself on?) and to reflect and critique during the dialogue. Their engagement with the dialogue is at once a reflective process and a meaning making process. As they reflect throughout, questioning themselves and each other, it is easy to draw the conclusion that they are highly reflective practitioners, it is clearly evident. However, it may not be an ordinary part of the role: '*can we do this every Friday*?' is revealing of a desire for more reflective space and an implicit suggestion there is currently not enough of it.

Although there is clear reference to limitations in practice, there is little sense in this dialogue of any intention for their approaches to community work as placatory practice. There is commitment and drive to engage fully with practice that has social justice intention and their dialogue is revealing more of a challenging environment to work in, rather than of any limitations of their practice intentions. This is not to suggest they offer some form of exemplar, rather their dialogue reveals limitations, frustrations, and barriers but their drive and perspectives are clearly situated in democratic potential and political process.

There are specific challenges raised in this dialogue that can be contextualised to neoliberalism, conspicuously, the impact of budget cuts and the pressures on practice that come from top down directives to engage with activities that sit uncomfortably alongside

community development principles. This manifests in ways that may appear innocuous or even positive to the untrained eye, however in practice they have far reaching consequences. At a simplistic level a monitoring system being introduced can be seen to be about the much-needed highlighting of the importance of community work and what it has to offer, however its design and implementation can enhance or more likely seriously limit, practice. This is particularly so if it comes from an individualistic perspective that is not embedded in an understanding of, and respect for, community development processes. Whether that is interpreted as a deliberate influencing of practice or an inadvertent result of 'thoughtless action' (Ledwith 2011), what this reflects is the need for community development practice being monitored using community development process.

Horton's words in conversation with Freire have relevance here as concluding thoughts:

> There's no such thing as just being a co-ordinator or facilitator, as if you don't know anything. What the hell are you around for if you don't know anything. Just get out of the way and let somebody have that space that knows something, believes something (Bell, Gaventa & Peters 1990:154).

The participants talk of booking rooms, moving chairs, attending events, and chatting in the street which are co-ordinating and facilitating activities, but also significantly much more than that. Grounded in ideological reasoning, they are consistently thinking about cultural, social, and political inequalities and where their position, alongside people in communities, can be best placed in striving for democratic potential.

DIALOGUE 3: Justice and journey

This participants in this dialogue both have lengthy experience as community workers. Based in a Scottish city, they describe their approach to community development as grounded in building community with young people. A highly reflective, engaged dialogue, the participants listen and bounce off each other in a respectful and thoughtful process that reveals their approaches to community development as premised fundamentally on their values.

At times, they refer to youth work in relation to their roles and the organisation, however their default is to describe their work as community development and specifically as building community. This has significance in different ways and is illustrative primarily of their attitudes to young people, their thoughts on values-based practice and predominantly how community development approaches create atmospheres of mutuality through grounding in ideologies of equity. They work alongside young people from across the city who experience marginalisation in various forms and many of them have life circumstances that are contextualised by poverty and its many ramifications.

They are based in a city centre church and whilst their approaches are undoubtedly influenced by community development values and principles, they also highlight the nurturing, and ideological grounding, they get from theology. Part of the analysis of this dialogue therefore considers their presentation of the influence of their belief system on their practice in relation to meanings of transformation.

This dialogue reveals practice that is founded on the principles of humility, love, respect, elegant challenging, dialogue and relationship building, political process, and collaborative striving for social change.

The themes in this dialogue are:

- Creating transformative community
- Purpose and meaning
- Creative tension
- Justice and journey

Creating transformative community

The participants open by focussing on their approach as engaging with young people in order to grow community with them. There is an explicit emphasis on growing community rather than putting on service provision and this has prominence as the key defining feature of their practice. This dialogue is revealing of a values' base grounded in mutuality, equity, respect, and self-determination, with building relationships a central premise. It is long established practice and the participants open by revisiting the early days of the organisation because their approach remains defined by the founding ideological principles.

J – I'm particularly interested in how you approach your work as community workers…?

E – …it can vary to some degree, but it tends to hang around stories and key activities or key meeting points with young people. So, we will often tell the story of how [the organisation] started and how it grew which is a story of encounter and relationship...and collaborative working. So, I think that's one of the consistent things we use to describe our current work, we kind of wind the clock back [to the beginning] …

S – Yeah, I think we tell the stories of the beginnings of [the organisation] because our primary focus is around our approach and our values. The activities that we do, is a secondary thing, and the activities completely vary from week to week and month to month. But it's not rocket science, it's really old school community development work, where we build relationships, we ask questions, we work together. And our language I think is always very important as well in terms of how we describe what we do. So, we state very explicitly 'we are not a service we don't put things on for young people, we are growing a community with them'. And these are very subtle distinctions, but I think that underpins, the foundation, of everything else we do, which again stems from the beginnings of [the organisation's] narrative, taking cups out onto the grass and asking those open questions.

Framing their work as community development, they highlight the use of relationship building, collaboration, and curiosity in their engagement with young people. There is a strong sense of this as long-established practice, with the same underpinning values driving the approach now as in the early days of its establishment. The deliberate language use, avoiding service provision in favour of building community with young people, immediately introduces the significant ideological underpinnings to their practice. In this way they articulate Ledwith's (2007) call for vigilance in avoiding neoliberal pressures towards falling into service provision, and there is a strong sense of mutuality as a central premise. Ultimately, they claim they are engaged with young people, not doing things for young people, and this is stressed as an important difference and as the enduring conceptual underpinning to their approaches.

Much as Ledwith (2016:290) goes on to suggest this approach is more likely to facilitate challenges to marginalisation, oppression, and structures of power, we see respectful, anti-oppressive attitudes manifesting from the outset. A focus on encounter and relationship paints a picture of processes of reaching out, showing interest, and caring. It is tentative and

grounded in a curiosity of spirit, an interest in the lives of the young people, an offering of engagement and dialogue, a proposed coming together. Notably, there is no sense of the participants assuming a stance of knowing better, no suggestion they enter the encounters from a premise of assumed expertise about the young people's lives, on the contrary, it is a reaching out in order to find out.

S – I think some of the key words that I imagine will underpin most of this conversation for me is about power. So, in the very first days…it was a wee team of people…looking out onto the grass saying: 'there's a community out there that we know nothing about, and can we go and get to know them?' There wasn't an agenda, there wasn't any plans to start a project, there wasn't any dreams to begin an organisation, it was really open ended – 'hey guys, who are you? What are you about? We are interested in your lives'… So, you know, it was going into the young people's space, it was asking permission to enter the young people's lives.

J – Yes.

S – And the young people granted that, and granted that quite willingly, because there had been a couple of other encounters over the years and months before between the [team] and the young people. But those opening questions of 'hey guys, who are you, what are you about?' and then the follow up question of 'if' and only once relationship and trust had been established and built, the question of 'if you had a little bit of space in the building, what would you guys want to do with it?'; and that has always been our approach ever since. Things have grown organically, and things have grown massively. [Our] roots are about meeting young people where they are at, and that is metaphorical and that is physical.

J – Okay.

S - So if they are not actually on the grass in the same degree as they were, let's get out into the streets, let's get on Facebook, let's go on home visits, let's go up to [area], let's go…you know… but it's always got those same underpinning questions.

Immediately there is a sense of a tentative, respectful reaching out to young people to invite them to engage, openly characterised by an interest in their lives. Framed as an asking of permission to enter their lives, a picture is painted of deep levels of respect permeating this approach. There is no sense of entitlement, either to engage with the young people or of them responding, and this is significant. Freire's (1972) thoughts on the dangers of an approach grounded in 'cultural invasion' are useful here. He highlights the potential for the identities of groups or communities to become diluted by educators embodying and promoting more powerful cultures, whereas here we see a tentative, respectful approach that strives to connect with the young people, not dominate them, to get to know them, and to see where it leads.

Westoby (2019:210) highlights the centrality of being 'in conversation with one another discussing…creating their vision together…respecting differences' to community development and there is an immediate sense of this infusing the participants' approaches. Significantly, processes of being in conversation, creating and respecting, are suggestive of mutuality and an awareness of power dynamics. Indeed, Westoby (*ibid*) points to this approach as crucial in 'foreground[ing] the democratic impulse of community development'. This is usefully illustrative of much of what the participants are intending.

Undeniably, the role of dialogue in the encounters begins to come alive and this involves engaged conversation as the basis for relationship building with young people. Beck and Purcell (2010:81) suggest that an 'understanding of the idea of dialogue' is a requirement in these kinds of conversations. Taking this further and pointing to its centrality in community development practice, Ledwith (2011:71) usefully describes this as a 'mutual and reciprocal form of communication in which the act of listening in a holistic way is valuing, therefore

liberating'. This is kind of communication is framed by the participants as an ordinary everyday experience.

Davidoff (2016:173) talks of engaging 'from a place of open attentiveness' in order to experience a situation in all its 'layers, complexities, nuances, and depths'. The reaching out was noticeably over an extended period with an openness to building relationships and see what happens. That said, whilst the participants are looking back to the beginnings, it is in order to demonstrate that the curiosity, interest, tentative questioning, encountering and building of relationships in order to build community remains a central principle of their approach. Along the lines of Alinsky's (1971) 'relational meeting' the reaching out and conversing continues as an ideological underpinning to their more contemporary practice that remains grounded in dialogue for creating transformative community. Significantly, this allows for a journeying with principle rather than a 'determine and define' approach (Laredo 2020:5).

The notion of power is introduced, initially grounded in the principles underpinning the reaching out to young people, but subsequently developed as a multi-dimensional concept.

E – …listening, there's something in that sharing [of a drink that] was an act of hospitality on both sides. So there was the initiative of [the team] they took it out and offered it, so there is a power dynamic there… but there's power and hospitality the other way as well, in that… the grass felt more the young people's place, it was their house, not [the team's].

J – Yeah, yes.

E - There's also the power of rejection or acceptance I would imagine that they felt quite nervous at that point…will we be accepted?

S - Yep, mhmn, mhmn.

E - And there's something in that kind of meeting over a drink which is utterly natural, you know, culturally, in terms of British culture, appropriate. But yeah, the meeting didn't have to happen on either side, it risked rejection, it risked just going nowhere, that's the flip side of that [open] agenda, isn't it, that there was nothing they could rely on making happen. Yeah and if we shift too far from that into thinking everything's got to happen in here, or into [thinking] it's all about what we bring or do…then we start to lose something important.

The notion of mutuality comes further alive here as we begin to see community development grounded in relationships and hospitality. Drawing on Derrida's (1997) notion of community as hospitality, Westoby and Dowling (2013:5) point to relationships that are 'welcoming of the other', and in this way, they suggest, a coming together in relationships that have hospitality on both sides makes the building of community together more feasible. This is revealing of the participants' inherent attitudes that are grounded in equity and a need for creating two-way processes, crucially they are also acknowledging that power is an aspect of being in relationships, not a one-way dynamic, nor a present to be gifted (Jeffs and Smith 1996).

Of course, as Lukes (1974:26) highlights, power is a contested concept and 'ineradicably value-dependent'. In this context an awareness of power dynamics is critically important as Urie, McNeil, Frödén, Scott, Thomas, Escobar, Macleod & McKerracher's (2019:94) 'danger of mis-stepping' comes alive. In the immediate engagement, there is undoubtedly power on both sides, however the complexities of that are important, and the attempts could easily be misguided. There is the power to choose to encounter each other or not, there is the church, Christianity and a powerful colonial history, an extravagant building, the power of the adult team to reach out, even to have drinks to offer, the power to choose to reach out with

respect or conversely with superior saviour attitudes, the power of friendly offerings. This is situated alongside the power of young people in community together in their space, power that comes from being 'revolting subjects' (Tyler 2013), a pushing back, the power to welcome and engage, or not. The participants are enjoined to understand differing levels of power in their analysis of their engagement and they apparently connect it to their values, with much care taken to describe the nature of the encounter and their ongoing encounters with young people. These power dilemmas are ongoing.

S – And I think the kind of concept of going into their space on the grass somehow has continued even when they are in the building, I think, because the young people really get free reign to decorate how they want, and to set things up how they want, and you wander round and there's hand prints all over the walls, and there's paint splashes in places.

E – Yeah.

S – So almost, much as we are in the building, much as it's drop-in or one to one stuff, it almost feels as though we are doing detached work in the building, because it's their space and it's their, or its co-owned, space and territory.

E – If we take that thing of the initial engagement, you'd got [the team] and they had their house and the young people had their house out on the grass, actually what's come about is we've built a new house together that's ours and theirs.

S – Yeah, yeah, I think that's a really good way of putting it, actually.

E - … the doors are open and they stay open and young people come in and out, it's not about, you know people talk about youth work getting young people off the streets, and I always take the opportunity to say, it's not about that at all. And nor is it about them coming in…it's about working with them, building community with them that enables them to take up their life in the city.

There are elements of community as place and as identity (Popple 2015; Craig *et al* 2011) evident here. There is a sense of place with the building providing the space as the focus of coming together and people are being identified as 'young people'. However, in this context, building community points more readily to creating shared spaces together, the 'creative generation of spaces where people can interact and find common ground' (Westoby & Dowling 2013:6). Shared ownership is central to this as the space within the building takes on a fluid identity based on hospitality and respect. Notably, there is also a community outside the building and as the young people continue to have their space there, they too engage in shared community in the building, and move between the two. In this way there is representation of community as multi-faceted but notably continuously represented as in relationship and created. Furthermore, the building of community is grounded in the relationships and in the ongoing encounters that essentially need to be grounded in humility, much as Ledwith (2011) advises. There is indeed a strong sense of humility throughout this dialogue.

The direct challenge to youth work as diversionary or 'getting young people off the streets' is noteworthy. Furlong (2013) points to four broad themes that underpin youth work practice, namely: practice as informal education; practice towards critical thinking and citizenship with young people; practice grounded in the socialisation of young people; and, practice that leans more towards a premise that young people are unruly and in need of control. Whilst the final point is anathema to the participants' articulations of their perspectives, the former three have relevance, as does Batsleer's (2010:153) characterisation of practice as 'adopt[ing] a critical stance that can be unsettling of all assumptions of the status quo'. However, their focus specifically on building community with young people through relationships, encounter and dialogue creates a different, more complex picture and is of critical importance to their approaches and why they, more readily, define them as community development.

E – … in a sense that relationship is encounter that keeps going, isn't it? And so challenge is something that we would talk about quite a lot because, basically, because not everything is right in the world, and not everything is right in me…and…so if we are to stay in relationship, if we are to stay in community then challenge is going to come…because challenge that makes a difference is challenge that happens in relationship…

S – … yeah, coz if it's about creating transformative community, it's about transforming ourselves, it's about transforming the young people, the team, it's about transforming the systems and structures, it's about transforming practice, and all of that comes back to power and how we do relationships and how we ask questions and how we reflect, it's all about power… creating transformative community…is broader and could encompass creativity as well as other things coz I guess there's lots of different types of community, so we are not community for the sake of it, we're not introspective, we're not a club, we're not self-serving, and I think that's really key as well, we are about making a deliberate difference.

Evidently introducing the idea that community in this context is not simply about idealistic notions of the good life (Shaw 2008), the participants point to relationships that involve challenge and a questioning of self and of others, in order to build community together that can be transformative. This leans more towards community as real, engaged process, warts, and all, but with a sense of encounter grounded in hope for positive change. The eloquence of hooks (2003:116) is once again useful in articulating this, as she states: 'we bear witness publicly to engender hope, to let readers know that genuine connection and community is possible'. There is indeed hope evident in the participants' expression of building community with young people, notably hope that it will positively impact on lives, make a deliberate difference, and this is their central premise.

There are consistent references to transformation and, whilst specific examples are not yet evident, we undoubtedly see a deliberate nod to their expectations that their approaches continually strive for positive social change. Reminiscent of Bhattacharyya's (2004:13) perspective on community development practice as 'not accepting an undesirable condition as fate or unchangeable' and Banks (2019:11) need for 'acknowledging harmful differences that can be remedied' the creating of community with young people is framed by a purposeful process towards the greater good. It is however noticeable that the participants' references to transformative practice also relate to individual young people changing. As Shaw (2007:28) warns of the dangers of 're-present[ing] persistent structural problems as local problems susceptible to local or individual solutions' the individual focus presents some dilemmas in terms of the nature of community development practice.

The references to making a deliberate difference are suggestive that Ledwith's (2007:608) 'transformative social justice intention' are held close to the participants' hearts, how that manifests in practice is their challenge.

Purpose and meaning

There is a strong emphasis on meanings in this dialogue, with the focus not just on building community but on the purpose of creating community with young people, in effect the purpose of the participants' approaches. The values that drive this are central and include their respectful attitudes to the young people, and each other. In effect, as Westoby (2020:66) usefully articulates, their intention is to work with young people as 'equal participants in a process of inter-subjective dialogue and co-creation'. Whilst there is a wish, and drive, for better lives for, and with, the young people, there is an explicit desire not to try to control that, nor to step into a powerful dynamic of 'knowing better'. Rather, as Bowles (2008) highlights the values-led approach strives to create trusting relationships based on

openness, honesty, and respect. This approach is importantly grounded in 'ethical and political responsibility' (Freire 2016:56), that drive hopes for, and actions towards, transformation. This is indeed a challenging balance that the participants openly grapple with in the dialogue and in their practice. It appears influenced both by theology and community development principles and at times the two appear to unite but at others appear to be a source of reflective struggle.

E – So, you know that's about the future and who they will become but it's also about now and the fact that if they want to come in, sit in here for a bit and then go out, and sit on the grass for a bit, then that's great, the going out is as important as the coming in. The doors are open, and they stay open. Now, there's a threshold there as well, and so they know as they come across the threshold that there are some expectations, some requirements that are not there outside. But they know that that's what makes this a safer space, what makes this different, so they want that difference as well.

S - And the consistency of knowing that it will remain different.

E – …that coming in and going out thing [in open sessions] …one of the challenges of that is a young person who comes in, plays a game of pool, goes out.

S - Necks their cider.

E - Comes back in, you know. And on one level you're thinking well, what are we saying here, you know…but they <u>are</u> sitting on the grass drinking cider and they <u>will</u> sit on the grass drinking cider…

S - Whether we're here or not.

E - And if we say: 'you can't do that' [it will be misguided], but what we can do is, we can engage with them, and we can hold that boundary of: 'yeah, you can do that but if you doing that means that you come back in and you are negatively affecting other people or yourself, then we will challenge you on that. So, we are not going to stop you, we're not going to make

your decisions for you, but we are going to engage with you around the consequences of those decisions'.

S - And I think reflections from, especially the older young people who are then able to look back on their more wild younger teenage years, they will say: 'of course we knew you thought it was bad for us, and we knew that it was bad for us, but we really appreciated the fact that you never told us that it was bad for us. Instead you asked us: 'what is this about? Why are you taking drink and drugs? What's going on in the rest of your life?' And actually, it kind of winds me up when a lot of youth and community work only focusses on behaviour, whereas I think we are much more interested in these really deep issues around identity and value and worth…

Belton (2010) argues that young people are the subject of regular discrimination that is almost acceptable in society in ways that other discrimination is not. In this context, the focus on identity and worth rather than behaviour is noteworthy. This kind of engagement requires a stepping out of your own boundaries of understanding into engagement as 'connected knowing' that allows for a fuller hearing of 'the truth of others' Ledwith (2011:71), and this is important. It points to engaging with young people as they are, for who they are and not through 'adult imposed labels…usually pejorative labels', as Davies (2005:14) argues, or indeed through narrow judgments or limited lenses.

Again, Adichie's (2009:2) 'single story' is a useful illustration here as she reflects: 'She felt sorry for me even before she saw me…patronizing, well-meaning pity'. In this way Adichie points to the 'limits of one dimensional and taken-for-granted ideas about others' (Palmer 2020) and decisively the danger of that. Conversely in this situation, there is no attempt to define young people using such limited assumptions, nor is there effort to define them by their relationship to the worker, and this has significance. The young people are not referred

to in any way that is an imposed service-led label, basically they are not clients, service users or customers, they are young people, and this is a deliberate political positioning.

Further, cognisant that young people do not constitute a homogeneous group, building community with young people means the encounter is not defined by those burdened by a 'specific label' (Belton 2010), rather it is with young people as they choose to engage, and this is important. Notably however, not being defined by the relationship in no way diminishes the importance of the relationship, conversely, it heightens it, particularly in the sense of it being fuelled by truth and autonomy in developing democratic, respectful practice (Batsleer 2013; Jeffs & Smith 1999). These are particular types of relationships that are grounded in driving for equity and fundamentally, this approach consciously pushes against the everyday discrimination Belton (2010) refers to above. It also potentially pushes against what Garasia, Begum-Ali and Farthing (2015:3) point to as 'an emergent focus on the behaviours of individuals, rather than social concerns like inequality or discrimination'. This is complex however because whilst there is evidently a focus on individuals in this dialogue, the focus is not on behaviours but on a hope for better life circumstances and outcomes, combined with social concerns.

Much as Banks (2010:2170) talks of integrity as being whole, complete, with 'no part taken away', the participants strive to act from a place of seeing the world as it is, the young people as complete, and just as they are. They aim to respond to that in ways that are open to wherever it takes them, much as Davidoff (2016:174) explains: 'each person's subjective experiences are regarded as the most important place of knowing. This is what I see, I experience'. The emphasis on building community as relationships of hospitality remains.

There are little, almost throw-away, comments in this dialogue that are further illustrative of the processes of engagement in creating transformative community. 'Older young people' will reflect both on their journeys, and the approaches to practice that are experienced as respectful and honest, and this is revealing of the multiple relationships that are engendered. The danger here is in the possible inference that young people need to be developed or 'older' before they can reflect on their behaviours, however the broader culture of respect suggests otherwise.

S - …it's interesting, like people will sometimes ask us: 'well what rules do you have?' And actually, we have very few rules. It's like: no drink and drugs in the building…no babies in open sessions…because some of the young people have now had babies…and no making babies.

E – It sounds like a euphemism but it's actually true…

S - …[it can be very unpredictable] so we will let young people come in if they have been under the influence, they've been drinking or taking drugs, and we'd rather keep an eye on them and make sure they are safe and well. There would be exceptions to that based on evidenced encounters when young people have been damaging or destructive or, you know, negatively impacting themselves or others or property. But that would be done in negotiation with them, we'd say: 'look there's been this pattern, and can we do some work outside open sessions?' or whatever…

J - …possibly, some people would describe it as risky working with young people who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or going out to take it and come back in, so why do you work like that?

E - There's a couple of things in my mind, one is the simple thing of that's who they are. That's the fact, the reality, the truth of, just as I am who I am, that young person is who they

are at this moment. So, it's starting with the world as it is rather than the world as we want it to be…or the world that would suit the intervention that we decide.

J – Yes.

E - But I think as well, there's something in there that draws on the fact that we are a Christian organisation…an assumption if you like of their inherent worth, and value, and beauty, and wholeness, and potential to be more. And I think, not to say that that view can only come from a Christian standpoint, but it's very profoundly rooted by that…there's that commitment to accept people where they are, to meet with them where they are, but not just in theory, in practice…that collective commitment nourished by that theological perspective.

S – I think there's also a couple of quite pragmatic things that I would add to that as well in terms of 'why do we take risks the way we do?'. Number one being these are really vulnerable young people who do not go anywhere else to find support, to find help… they are so mistrustful of authority of adults, of anything, and what we really want to do is embrace them and bring them in, and build up that relationship, so that they then get the support that they really need…[risky behaviour is] actually quite a rare phenomenon, the young people are really self-policing, so they respect this place so much, they respect the team so much. More often than not it would be the older young people, or the more established young people, that will come nudge, nudge, 'hey S, someone's just brought in a bottle, you might want to go and check that out, I don't think they understand how this place runs yet'. And so, you know, there'd be that kind of peer policing and so again we don't have very many rules because we don't need very many rules.

J – Yes.

S - It's not to say there aren't incidents, there are sometimes incidents. But, another reason why I think it's less risky than it perhaps sounds is because of the team dynamic as well…for us it is an everyday, every hour, every minute practice… you are just clocking the risks all

the time and you are adapting, you're reflecting and you are calling on other team members, on other young people, to help out if need be.

The building of community is illustrated further by the creation of spaces that are held by dialogue and engagement, and peer approaches, rather than coercion or even enforcement from the workers. Freire's (2016:54) contention that 'Authoritarian power is prying, not curious or questioning' usefully illuminates this. Furthermore, hooks' (2000:93) perspective that 'Cultures of domination rely on the cultivation of fear as a way to ensure obedience' is illustrative as anathema to the participants' approach. 'Dialogue on the other hand is full of curiosity and unrest', Freire continues (*ibid*), and in doing so further illustrates processes at play here that create a community with a '*dialogic atmosphere'* (his emphasis), a curiosity, an interest, and a profound sense of caring.

This requires a sophisticated level of awareness, reflection, and collaboration, and notably the team will support each other as they draw on one another's strengths, but equally build relationships with young people that enable a similar mutuality. Such reciprocity is reminiscent of the 'humble, loving and courageous encounter' Freire espouses that is nurtured by dialogue (1972:100). As E concludes, this allows for the starting point of the world as it is, rather than starting from an assumed place of betterment, or more profoundly avoiding a service-defined approach. It thus allows for the processes of mutually creating community with purpose and meaning, in multiple ways. Consequently, there are communities in the building led by young people, as well as community in the spaces outside, alongside shared community in the building, and these multiple experiences of community are important to a sense of the ordinary but also the extra-ordinary in terms of what might be achieved.

Much as Orton and Barclay (2019) point to their own reflections on their Christian faith as central to their approaches, the participants point to theological perspectives as nourishing both them, and their approaches, and therefore their relationships with young people and colleagues. As Laredo (2020:14) reflects: '[whilst] faith is clearly a primary motivator, neither the team not the space feels overtly pious in its everyday work'. The underpinning belief in inherent worth, and the potential to be more, meet with the community development recognition that 'all human beings have dignity and worth qua humans, with rights to make choices, to cultivate their human capabilities and live decent lives…' (Banks 2019:11). Whilst the participants have clarity that, for them and some of the team, theology fuels their values-led approach, they are equally engaged with other philosophical and theoretical perspectives, and there is an eclectic sense to their theorising of, and their approach to, their practice. They are also clear that theology is not as equally important to the young people or the whole of the team, and their references to power, whilst not explicitly related to Christianity, are an important leveller.

The acknowledgement that the young people are vulnerable and mistrustful of adults is respectfully suggestive of their challenging life circumstances. Iacouvu and Aassue (2007) highlight the diffidence and precarity that pervade young people's lives generally, and Sercombe (2010:129) points to 'situations of great need, where young people feel deeply powerless over anything much in their lives'. Expanding on this, Giroux (2012:18) points to the neoliberal discourse that systematically stigmatises young people, suggesting that because they are:

> reared in a society in which hope is privatised and the ethical imagination tranquilised, it becomes difficult to assume responsibility for the other or… to sustain a sense of justice and collective responsibility for the common good.

Fully aware of the dynamic Giroux is describing, the participants' impetus for creating transformative community is premised on building a counterculture to it, along with an atmosphere of hope, and action, for more, ultimately for better. They know the young people's life circumstances are impacted by social inequalities including poverty, ageism, care-experience, mental health, racism, trauma, ableism, marginalisation, unemployment, unequal schooling, homophobia, alongside the uncertainty that characterises teenage lives, much as Iacouvu and Aassue (2007) highlight above. In this context, the humility to meet young people with respect and integrity is buoyed by the courage to see social injustice and its causes, both as unacceptable, unnecessary, and riven with searing ramifications for young people's life chances.

Batsleer (2013:18) highlights the absence of anything 'positive or affirmative in neoliberal accounts' of young people and she calls for an acknowledgement of the 'rich young person, rich in potential, rich in resources and therefore rich in difference'. In doing this, she is articulating something closer to the attitudes to young people visible throughout this dialogue. There is hope for better, underpinning all their actions in the building of community, much as Freire describes as '…critical, in-no-way-naïve optimism…in the very nature of human beings' (2018:12) and the participants see and acknowledge the richness of the young people.

S – I'll illustrate it with a real story of a young man [and his] pals… very angry young men… quite different to the rest of the young people… who would be a bit more laid back on the whole, [granted, I'm] generalising. They were a real challenge, like for the first couple of years… running rings around us, they were playing games… we had to call the police coz, you know it was really, really challenging.

J – Yeah, yes.

S - And over time, they slowly, slowly, slowly settled in and built friendships with the other young people and started trusting us a little bit more… and tragically…one of their best friends, one of that group committed suicide. And we were the place that they turned for support. And they saw how upset we were, and how far we were willing to go to open extra, to do whatever we could to support. And something changed in the relationship with that group at that point, and they started describing this place as their home and their family. And this particular lad that I'm talking about, he was in and out of care for his whole life, I think he was in sixteen different foster homes over the course of his life, something crazy like that.

J – Ooh.

S - …he was probably one of the biggest transformations from being this really angry young man out on the street to being one of the biggest fans, supporters [of here]…there was one team member in particular who he had this really good relationship with…[S then details an event that impacted negatively on the team member]…she was absolutely gutted, totally devastated: 'I don't know how I can work with him now, this trust has been destroyed'. And he was full of shame and embarrassed… it was right for her to step back and figure out how they were going to/if they were going to repair their relationship.

J - Yeah, yes.

S - But we, as a community, still loved him and respected him and she still loved him as well; but love sometimes means tough boundaries…tough love. So, others got alongside him and started picking up the support. It was last year that he shared his story for the annual report, and it was the first time he had really, fully, reflected on his journey and [his very violent past and] what that had actually meant.

J – Uhu.

S - And it took about four years for them [he and the team member] to get back to a place of a really forgiven, second chance, good healthy relationship again. And he just had never experienced that before, because he'd been kicked out of this home, and shunted to that

one, and [another]… So, there's the pragmatic stuff in there around team and supporting one another and it's not all on that particular team member…we all have responsibility. But it's also theology – grace and forgiveness and second chance, and I think that's what prompted him…not that that's the language he would use. But when he talks of his violent past (somehow he would seriously batter people for no reason) he is really embarrassed…and he says: 'I know I've stopped people being the full person that they could really be'…that for me illustrates the risks that we need to take, and we know that it works, we know that, that long-term sticking with them, no matter what, but having clear boundaries and having consequences…

E – … it's not that every scenario, every organisation, every agency is going to have the luxury of that time, but if we are serious about the differences that we want to make then we need to be honest with ourselves about, about time. And about the degree to which lives, people, change over time. And we can tell ourselves stories about transformation which frequently don't take account of that, but there are some things that can only happen through time, and sometimes painful time…

Davies (2015) points to the need for practice to be premised on the grounding principle that young people as individuals with individual concerns, needs, aspirations and demands are respected within the relationship. Evidently, the violence the young man engages in is retold as his story but without judgement, he is angry, but he is not a single story of violence (Adichie 2009). Equally, his story is not told from a place of collusion, the impact of his actions on others is clearly included. It is part of the reality of the narrative and in this way, the practice emerges from his lived realities (Ledwith 2020). Additionally, this points to the nature of engagement as encounters involving 'listening from the heart' (Ledwith 2016:52) and perhaps more so, as 'ethical encounters suffused with love' (Laredo 2020:11), notably and meaningfully grounded in community as hospitality.

The reality of a young life in numerous different foster homes paints a picture of uncertainty and a lack of basic loving relationships that many take for granted. By contrast, the mention of love as part of the relationships that build community is therefore striking, partly in the ordinariness of its presentation, partly as evidenced hope for change, but also as a framework for challenging. He and his group of friends slowly connect with the community and they become part of it. In this way community groups merge and there is a sense of community as an ever-evolving entity.

The response to the young man is in many ways reminiscent of the 'love ethic' hooks (2001:91) talks of and a 'cultural embrace of love' that involves 'honesty, openness, and personal integrity…expressed in public and private decisions'. Her work on love is of particular relevance here, principally in its grounding in values and in its essence as a driver for positive social change, as she espouses that love cannot exist without a framework of justice. Purcell (2020:26) expands and suggests that what he calls 'professional love' underwrites the 'realisation of radical hope', notably claiming it is 'dangerous for neoliberalism'. There is a real sense that the community building, grounded in love, is deliberately counter to the neoliberal induced 'fractured communities' (Tyler 2013:7) and that is a powerful image.

This also points to an approach that deliberately attempts to avoid 'cultural invasion' in conscious favour of understanding, engaging, and learning. Freire, in dialogue with Horton (Bell *et al* 1990:131), usefully muses:

> How is it possible for us to work in a community without feeling the spirit of the culture that has been there for many years, without trying to understand the soul of

> the culture? We cannot interfere in this culture. Without understanding the soul of the culture, we just invade the culture.

Far from simplistically suggesting a culture of violence is to be respected, this relates to the need for a depth of engagement that will strive to get to know the young people, who they are, and their culture, from a respectful stance, whatever immediate behaviours are evident. The young man and his friends have their culture and consequently time was taken to recognise that and to get to know it, and them. Garasia *et al* (2015:5) criticise 'practice oriented towards ensuring that young people fix themselves so they fit into the social order', and at surface level this young man's story could be interpreted as such, indeed that question remains. However, the shared building of community suggests there is something else is going on here that is fuelled by the grounded values of respect and mutuality in community as hospitality and dialogue (Westoby 2019).

E – I think that's one of the big things in my mind as you are talking is that… it's on a practical level as well, trying to make sure that what we do keeps connecting us with purpose and meaning. And the image that's in my mind is saturation that we are saturated with that purpose, that meaning. It's that constant shaping of reflective practice… reflective space that explicitly says that the meanings of our work are important… by having those kinds of habits then I think people do the stuff with a level of consciousness, intentionality and a level of questioning. And a level of learning that actually enriches it, and that helps us to absorb and withstand the shocks and challenges, because we're edified by that process. But also I think, it helps us to see something bigger, something further down the road to see what is in this moment is not the whole, it is the truth but it is not the whole truth, it can get better, it can change.

In terms of purpose and meaning, the commitment to, and belief that, as individuals we all have the capacity to reach the potential within us is a central premise underpinning this approach. Again, there is the potential for a theology driven individual perspective here in believing as individuals we can reach our own potential. However, there is more than that going on here, it also points to a social responsibility grounded in the belief that by working together it is possible to challenge the limiting impacts of socio-economic circumstances. In community development this becomes a required ideological underpinning to practice, however, care is indeed required to ensure simplistic perspectives of this do not abound that result in young people, as Lorde (2007:125) observes, being the: 'oppressed peoples [who] are always being asked to stretch a little more' and thus take responsibility for socially imposed struggles.

There is awareness of this societal dynamic and consequently a conscious fine balance is navigated in building community with young people through engaged relationships that are grounded in lived realities, love, humility, and respect. In this way they 'help knit together a feeling of a caring and loving community where people's presence is valued' (Laredo 2020:11) and the intentions of this are indeed about hoping for better lives individually, but also for wider positive change, and the two are inextricably linked.

S - We've developed these kinds of rhythms of practice, that are actually again based on our values so examples would be: we eat together three times a week, before we do open sessions, the team will sit down and we will have a home cooked meal and that will be staff, volunteers, young people, visitors, funders, you know whoever…

E – Not many people will be at all of them.

S – No, no, no.

J – The opportunity is there?

S - …so we have these rhythms to the week that helps us nurture our relationships and our sense of self… the values that we work towards with the young people just as much apply to the team. So, when we talk about holistic development with the young people and we say we are interested in their physical well-being, their emotional well-being, their social well-being, their spiritual well-being, the same things apply to the team… whatever that looks like for them…

E – As you talk about that holistic regard for team as well as young people, I can hear in my mind the question of well 'how can you do that, doesn't that just become unmanageable?' …and it's not easy…but if it matters, do it. Peter Block who is an organisational development consultant and does community stuff as well, talks about 'how' questions: how can you do that, how much will it cost? …if it matters, we can find a way and we can wrestle with the tensions.

J – How do you decide if it matters? How do you do that?

E – …organisationally that takes us back to the meaning and purpose thing, if we are sharing and shaping together that reflection, that expression of meaning and purpose, and testing of meaning and purpose then collectively that is generated…

J – Is it reflection? You've said reflection a few times, is it at the centre of that…?

E – …yeah, both as a conscious built in process but also in things like the expectation of and honouring of challenge and question – the scope is there and this is not just spoken but again it is embodied, it is active, things can change, if we see a better way of doing it, if we realise that it's not actually manifesting what we desire, then it can be changed. I think that people respond to that on quite a profound level.

S – Profound was actually going to be the word that I was about to say, like it's not just about practice, obviously that is a large whack of the reflections that we do but I think it's at a much deeper personal level: how was that session, what was good, what was not so good, could we have done things differently? Then spend a lot of time exploring ourselves: why was I

really triggered by that, what was it about, that encounter, that scenario and actually what does that even mean about my values and my world view…

E – Do I mean what I say I mean?

S – Yeah. So you speak to the team who have been around, well for anything more than a couple of weeks, and lots of us have now been around for years and years and years, and have no plans to move on, and I don't think that's an unhealthy thing.

J – Maybe it's unusual though?

S – Yeah, [people are] committed and see it's still a creative and dynamic place… I personally have been fundamentally changed by my encounters with the young people and with the team. And by asking questions and learning from their perspectives of the work, in every single area of life. Actually, I see the world very differently now from how I did before I was part of this community…It's quite a vague thing to say I've been changed by the young people around here, but again, I think some of the quotes from team members over the years would be able to specify that much more, there are very articulate people who have written a paragraph or a page on the changes in themselves as a result.

Lorde (2007:108) points to 'human difference as a springboard for creative change within our lives'. Whilst she laments this does not happen often enough, there is a sense of that happening here as S reflects on her learning and development (and that of her colleagues) through encounters with the young people. Fundamentally, we are invited to see that the focus of the participants' work is not one dimensional. The obvious reference to worldview, to values and to considering whether actions are grounded in integrity, has an essence of the ordinary as an everyday part of their practice. Notably, the transformation the participants talk of relates to those involved in the community, whether that be young people, workers, policy makers, politicians, funders or indeed, themselves. The intention is one of

conscientisation (Freire 2016), with the possibilities for learning from, and with, the young people a central premise.

Davidoff (2016) discusses reflective practice and the need to understand situations in all their 'layers, complexities, nuances and depth', suggesting that requires openly attentive engagement. Drawing from the power of action research to inspire a process of discovery, her thoughts on the nature of searching are usefully reminiscent of the curiosity, engagement and learning the participants engage with, as she suggests that when:

> something is of real interest to us; really matters to us; that is a way of stretching ourselves, of taking our knowledge and understanding further and into realms beyond where we are at any particular point. It is not merely a way of confirming what we already know (Davidoff 2016:174-5).

The participants present perspectives on their practice that are grounded in purpose and meaning, with openness to learning and engaging. It is presented as deeply reflective practice, the purpose being to create community with young people aiming at individual, collective and social transformation. The meaning of their practice is deeply embedded in a love ethic, in relationships of encounter and equity, fuelled by a belief system that everyone learns, everyone has worth, and everyone can meet their potential, given the right environment. They are indeed striving, daily, to create that kind of environment by building community with young people, and others, 'in favour of liberation, transforming this offensive world into a more people-centred one, from both a political and an ethical standpoint' (Freire 1997:14), they have clarity about their purpose and meaning and this is important.

Creative tension

There is no sense throughout this dialogue that community development is an easy process, more an enduring but creative challenge full of learning and opportunities. The participants point to how the wider neoliberal context pokes at their core values as they manoeuvre a creative tension. Their clarity around the purpose and meaning of their work, their deep commitment to values-led practice and a collaborative, community building ethos, means there is a push-pull effect as they rely on external funding sources and operate in a context that understands, and often desires, service provision more readily than community development process. In this context, the integrity of staying with their ethos, more importantly with the young people and their culture, is of fundamental importance and takes a certain level of courage.

J …why do you approach your work this way?

S – The first word that springs to my mind is courage, it really is not easy to do this, and to stay strong in it for a multitude of reasons, one being pastoral team care. But maybe start with the poverty industry that we are part of…and the neoliberal world that insists that things should be bigger, and more efficient, and more streamlined, and franchised, and programme based, and course driven, and I would attribute a lot of my radical tendencies to… [my colleague] she really mentored me in my early days.

J –… [colleague] who worked here with you?

S – Yeah… she really pioneered [the organisation], and I've got an aunt who works in community development overseas and she is a total radical as well. So various inspirations and… having the courage to take those risks…[and] that also extend[s] to the funders. So I think we established a really good pattern early on, which is along the lines of: 'do you know what, you think you want to fund that thing over there, but actually we achieve the same stuff, but this is how we do it. This is how we know it works, so why don't you come and fund

us instead. And if you don't want to that's fine, no worries, on your way, you know, no hard feelings'… but we are not going to compromise what we do and how we do it. And that just takes balls, you know what I mean? But it's totally achievable.

J – Yes, uhu.

S - … having not compromised and having had some really, challenging negotiations with funders… I probably trivialise it and make that sound simpler than it is, like there has been some really difficult decisions to make over the years, difficult conversations to have with those funders. The power stuff is not just how we work with the young people, but it is how we work with the systems and structures to challenge them.

J – Yes.

S - You know, the third sector should be the biggest critical voice of the government in the top down approaches in terms of community working, but because so much of the funding for the Third sector comes from the government they are not the critical voice that we should be a lot of the time. And so you know, it's too scary to rock the boat, we've got too many vested interests in having those difficult questions and conversations, so we then become another product and colluder of the poverty industry that makes its money off the back of the poor. That is a horrifically challenging statement and God help us [in this organisation] from ever colluding in that. It's a really hard one, but we ask those questions and we are willing to question. We are willing to grapple, and we are willing to turn down funding, and whatever opportunities, that it's not worth compromising the values over.

J – Some people might say that they have to do that, in order to get funding…

S – Yeah, yeah, well I've heard that…

J – But you don't think that? You say it's achievable, it's totally achievable?

S – Well I've got a question around: you have to do that, in order to do what? What's your priority, you know? So our priority is first and foremost, what is going to be the best for the young people… it's not to start running ten week employability classes, these are whole

young people and you know they might benefit from that [in some ways] but that's not our role, that's not our place to do. So, I think, the moment you take your eye off your vision, your values your mission [your values and practice are compromised].

When Craig *et al* (2011:7) frame community development as an 'embodied argument', they are pointing to it as 'a continuing search for new forms of social and political expression'. In many ways the highlighting of the need for a critical voice in the context of neoliberalism speaks to this. Furthermore, as Tyler (2020:173) points to the 'normalisation of austerity' and the 'depth and scale of the impoverishment it has effected', there are distinct threads throughout this dialogue that demonstrate a seeing of this, a knowing of its real impact on different levels, and a desire to do something about it. The conscious decision not to get pulled into tick-box employability programmes and course driven approaches to 'educate' or 'skill-up' young people in favour of staying with building community is highly significant. Evidently, the need to engage in ways that implicitly, or explicitly, challenge structural processes that create and maintain impoverishment and disenfranchisement, is clearly a central aspect of the purpose and meaning, the underpinning practice intentions.

As Ledwith (2007:1) signals the need for vigilance 'about changes in the political context', otherwise practice might fall into augmenting 'discrimination whilst still waving the banner of social justice' (2007:1), we see the participants openly grappling with these challenges. Additionally, their perspective suggests that vigilance about the political context is inextricably linked to vigilance about their values-base, with care needed to maintain that in order to avoid dangerous collusions.

E - …funders as well, how do we deal with those disappointments, how do we deal with the pressures…You were talking about your thinking through of the ethical side of this [Jean].

J - Yeah, yes.

E - And feeling stopped in your tracks, but you also said: 'but I think I've ended up at a better, clearer place' and for me engagement with funders is very much like that.

J – Okay.

E- … there'll be moments when you just think that this is impossible, they're asking ridiculous stuff, they don't understand. But if we've got that learning attitude, I think that's another sustaining factor… it's that balance between having the courage of our convictions and also the humility to know that we haven't got it all sussed… And recognise that that funder who is asking that question is really doing my head in but has a reason for asking it. And if I can answer it, I'll at least learn something about what we are doing here. And sometimes what I'll learn is that they just don't see what we believe is really important, and we need to go [in] different ways. And sometimes actually, they are saying something that we are missing, and we need to reshape this to take account of their insight as well. So, something like our approaches to monitoring and evaluation have been substantially shaped, not just by what we think is important, but by the questions that were asked. So yeah, it's that resistance and learning that have to go hand in hand otherwise…

S – It's quite a creative tension, isn't it?

E – Yeah, that's a great way of putting it.

S - … you know, I remember when we were thinking about approaching one significant funder that could have significantly shaped the value base of [the organisation], I remember sitting [our colleague] down…and going 'what are you doing to us? You're going to make us compromise everything'… And similarly, since that point other team members have done that to me, you know, not in an angry way…but it's healthy I think… and this has been a slowly evolving process over the years.

The mission to remain true to the purpose and meanings of their approach, illustrated here by the refusal to allow funding-led influences on the values-base, is of significance. Jeffs and Smith (1999) are much quoted for highlighting the common Janus approach of occupying contrasting places by focussing on the 'deficits' of young people in order to secure funding, whilst engaging values of respect, fairness, democracy and truth when with young people. Granted, this remains a prevailing challenge within a neoliberal context as funding is driven by 'needs-led' analyses (Fraser 2020), nonetheless the participants are adamant the values come first and the potential for such contradictory actions is exposed, questioned and avoided.

Dialogue is continuously revealed as a central concept as their practice meets with the way Ledwith and Springett (2010:146) talk of an 'act of engagement in a space of mutual respect'. Notably, this is explained as being extended to the negotiations with funders and the notion of a creative tension is further revealed in its involvedness. A learning attitude is evident, as is an atmosphere of mutual, 'elegant challenging' (Thompson 2007), notably in those inevitable negotiations with funders, but moreover in relation to young people's and colleagues' experiences.

E – [to S] …another aspect of the team thing [is] there's a handing on, a kind of sense of holding it collectively rather than the individual…people are informed and formed and shaped by your experience as someone who has been here for much longer, and the depth and richness of that experience, the way people draw on that, the way they will [also] throw up new things and your desire for that.

S – Mhmn, mhmn.

E - I think there's something really valuable about that, new people coming in and they can begin to shape what happens. And again, that's one of these things that is not always easy

to keep to. We can realise that we have drifted into power dynamics within [the organisation] where you've got a core and a powerful core, and a less powerful fringe, and [we] have to consciously rearrange that, consciously upset that balance. Because the most powerful thing about that core is the depth and richness of their experience, and that's only available to the rest of the team if those relationships of collaboration, and mutual value, and mutual learning, are there. One other thing I'd throw in that I think connects with a lot of that and comes through it, is the freedom to fail, which I think is so, so important.

S – Yeah, yeah.

J – How do you do that?

E – One of the ways that it happens here is we verbalise and articulate the expectation that we will screw up sometimes.

S – And we all have a list of very explicit examples of how we have done so in the past!

E – So, if you know that it is not unexpected that does one thing, and if you have experienced people sharing their mistakes, then that does something else. And if you experienced their mistakes being received, and worked with, not as points of blame, but as points of responsibility, so not to say' it doesn't matter', it's not just about giving each other a hug and moving on. It's about recognising, okay again, dealing with the reality: 'this is what's happened, what does that mean, who does that affect, what do we need to do to restore that… to deal with the consequences of that? And what can we learn from it?' So, it's that point of responsibility, and point of learning, but not a point of blame, and I think that's a massive part of sustaining.

S – Yeah, yeah.

E …and that means that we can do more, that young people find more in us, and hopefully are able, you know, like the story that S told, are able to begin to experience their own mistakes, their own wrongdoings in that context as well.

S – And I think for me just to build on that, yeah there's the freedom to fail and I think a lot of your unpacking of that has been about the failure and how we help grow and learn from that, but there's also that really important word of freedom. And I guess when we are saying 'right here's a significant amount of responsibility', and we do this with team members as well as you know, whether that's 'hey young person we've run out of milk, here's two quid' and them looking at their hand and going 'I can't believe you would trust me with two pounds', right up to you know: 'come and sit on this interview panel because we need to appoint this position', or whatever [like be involved in organising and hosting open evenings, design the annual report, film people's stories, meet with politicians, engage with academics, teach students] every possible opportunity to get their input. The freedom word is dead important because actually what that communicates is 'I trust you, I value you, actually I think that you could actually do this better than I could'.

E – Yeah, yeah.

S – … and I think that the freedom to fail is very much linked with the invitation to own… 'right what could we be doing around this, that or the other, in the coming months and years?' So folk genuinely feel that their voice is being heard.

Westoby, Palmer and Lathouras (2020:1) talk of the need for community development practitioners to '*deepen, expand,* and *disrupt'* their practice (their emphasis). They go on to elucidate that 'Deepen' invites practitioners to 'reflect on the roots of their practice [and] what wisdom is conscious or unconscious'; 'Expand' is their invitation to learn from published critical thinkers; and 'Disrupt' is their 'want' for 'practitioners to re-think taken-for-granted assumptions or habits about their practice' (*ibid).* Their thoughts are framed by the influence of the neoliberal context and the often-resultant service delivery approaches as they challenge practitioners for more. Interestingly, this dialogue reveals practitioners who are already cognisant of the impact of neoliberalism on practice, who already engage with these

dilemmas contemporarily, and notably are involved in approaches that have been mindful of such contextual challenges since its inception, many years ago.

They are indeed engaging with reading, and with processes that deepen and challenge their thinking, with attempts to expand their practice, and with questioning it in order to develop it. There is a sense of intellect and rigour in their reflections and this is pointedly not a new call for them. Notably, the participants' references to the need to have the 'courage of our convictions but also knowing there is much to learn' keeps them in a place in which they will continue to '*deepen, expand and disrupt'* their practice, indeed the learning is undoubtedly, unashamedly, and noticeably an ongoing everyday occurrence.

S - Just to give another wee example of this, it's not a wee example, it's a massive example. But when we hit ten years, [our colleague] had left about six months before. I was in a very reluctant acting up position, E wasn't on the scene in any way shape or form at that point… it was a very difficult transition. But the team got through it because they were so clear about the purpose and the mission and staying true to the young people, that's what got us through that difficult time. But actually, then asking the question of: 'what are we going to do?'. Like this is a real chance that we could stagnate, like we could just slip into delivery modes, survival modes, or could this be an opportunity to really re-group, re-think: 'where we are heading in the future?'

J – Uhu, mhmn.

S – So, we wanted to do something to mark the ten-year kind of point and we embarked in a really big project, creative. It was done through film making where basically we went and interviewed nearly a hundred people, I think, from young people, past and present, staff and volunteers past and present, board members past and present, funders, partners, as many people who were connected with the [organisation's] community as possible, to ask what

their perspectives were, and what was really important in [the organisation], and what they thought the future should look like. And we edited all that down into a ten-minute film…and in fact you were invited at that point, I was like oh I've heard of this guy called E, let's bring him into this event, and I think that was the first in a long-term strategy to woo you [to work here].

J – It worked.

S – Yeah. But we also invited like [name] local politician, [name of another politician], someone from [national organisation] I'm sure someone from the Uni… [obviously] as well as young people. And we showed this film. And then we had three hours of grappling with what are the themes… and what is our future going to look like? From that long process…so it took four or five months actually, a really widespread collaborative, consultation. I really don't like that word consultation because it is so loaded with tokenistic connotations, but in loads of other organisations when you are planning a five-year, ten-year plan or whatever, often the strategy would be that the management and the board would go into a back room and come up with a plan, come back and convince everyone, and do their charismatic thing, and then everyone gets on with board. And, that's just never going to be the way we approach [the organisation], so it has to come from the breadth of the community.

The participants' perspectives on building community with young people is further revealed in its complexity. Whilst it is indeed about communities of young people and those who work in the organisation, and undoubtedly also different but connected communities of young people, the comment on the breadth of the community also has importance. Considering politicians, academics, and policy makers as part of the wider community of the organisation reveals a dynamic awareness of the socio-political context and the need for connections in and beyond community. This responds to Shaw's (2007:28) challenge for awareness of the pitfalls of idealised perspectives on community obfuscating the 'social reality of communities'. It is also a conscious push away from the danger of communities of young people being held responsible at local level for socially constructed inequalities.

The politicians, policy makers and academics are involved in the dialogue much as Westoby (2019:209) explains: 'people need to be in conversation with one another discussing, and creating their vision together, and then respecting difference', but notably for the wider community to know and learn from young people's lived experiences and cultures. In this way the approach to developing community is multi-oriented. There is the opportunity for those in positions of power in relation to policy development, service planning and education, to be influenced by the young people and their lived experiences, and from the expertise of practice approaches, and vice versa.

S - So what emerged out of that process, and out of that event and those conversations, was a ten-year vision. I mean it's not a plan, because things change so much, but it was a (and actually this will sound a bit flippant): ''we don't care what we're doing in ten years' time, we care who we are as a community in ten years' time'. And again, the activity stuff is a secondary thing and it was in that document that we determined what our key priorities were in terms of our values and our growth. It enabled us eventually to approach [E] and say 'look this is where we think [the organisation] could be going, might you come and have a conversation with us about, whether you are interested or not?

E – One of the things that struck me in that document, quite strongly, was the confidence to say as the first priority in that ten-year vision was: to stay the same. How many ten-year plans or vision documents have you seen that start with that? But that was what young people, and former young people, were saying…and that matters in a neoliberal context, in a consumerist context, in a culture in love with novelty, to say: 'Our plan is to stay the same'.

S – Stubborn! And the symbol of that whole conversation became this green sofa which had been part of [the organisation] since the very beginning. The most mingin thing you could

possibly imagine, but we will not throw it out, because it symbolises that safety, consistency, values - everyone's had a kip on there at one point or another you know?

E –…and in terms of our purpose, [if] our purpose is emancipatory action, [if] it's about freedom, and [if] it's about actually enabling people to flourish, supporting people to flourish to be more than they have been before…

The centrality of community as a site for emancipation, flourishing and freedom remains the focus of the approach. William's (1976:76) thoughts on the warmth and persuasiveness of community as a favourable concept are evident and community is indeed presented both as 'shared experiences and solidarity' (Gilchrist 2019:3), and as affectionate relationships and 'family' (Popple 2015:12). Such idealistic notions of community are however tempered by the reality of inequalities, complex relationships, and an openness to work with challenge.

Rather than a simplistic notion of community as a sought-after good life, there is a sense of community as a site for relationships (Gilchrist 2019:46), ethical engagement and discourse, and once again 'an embodied argument' (Craig *et al* 2011) is illustrative of this. There is a grappling with the impacts of social abjection and the ramifications of poverty, discrimination, and oppression as part of negotiated relationships and community building. Westoby's (2019:209) thoughts that 'reimagining community as a symbolic site for dialogue and deliberation foregrounds the democratic impulse of community development' is revealing of the processes already current, and evidently at play here, in many ways a reimagining is possibly not necessary.

The notion of a vision, created by young people in partnership and being to remain the same, is characterised as in direct opposition to neoliberal driven outcome-led approaches. The creative tension is revealed in the expressed holding onto community development

process and the building of community wherever that may lead, against the challenging context of needs-led, marketized, measured, individualised, employment-oriented service provision (Fraser 2020; Tyler 2013; Brown 2006). In this way the participants' thinking, and approaches, operate as a counter narrative to Giroux's (2012) lamenting of neoliberalism as systemic contempt for community.

Justice and journey

Referring to the moving nature of community as something that is iterative and created, much as the participants do, Cameron (2016:203) highlights community development as 'sustaining active and participatory forms of community' and as a 'construct which is the outcome of human reflection and agency'. Interestingly, these reflective processes, critical thinking and questioning, and the constant attention to creating transformative community through relationship-building, are presented here as central to broader social justice efforts. The notion of community as creative process that morphs, blends, and creates opportunities for 'seeking counter hegemonic ways of framing and expressing collective identity' (McCrea, Meade and Shaw 2017:385), therefore goes some way to illustrating the participants' thoughts on their hopes for engaged community.

E – … [we've been] reflecting on inclusion and asking ourselves, 'is that open door as open as we think it is?' And just because it looks open from our side 'does it look open from the other side?'… there was a brilliant cartoon up on that white board for a while, as we've been exploring the stuff about inclusion and new young people coming in, and the text just said 'come on in' which sounds really kind of inviting doesn't it? The picture was this big monster eating something!

J – Okay.

E - And I just thought it was a manifestation of ambivalence about new people coming in, it was genius… and V the youth worker had been talking with some of the young people…and I think she used the words 'a culture of intimidation'. Challenging doesn't do it justice, the impulse to defend against that was massive, you know to discredit it… but actually, when we are talking about human beings there are dynamics of intimidation all the time, when we are talking about teenagers, it's particularly intense.

S - And when you're talking about teenagers that we have been working with for the six and seven years, long, long, long-term stuff and people who really feel that this is their place, you know, and the cliques that can emerge.

E - … sometimes it is a deliberate pro-active conscious thing and sometimes it's just, you know if you are thirteen and there is a seventeen-year-old over there who looks really cool, looks really hard, and they look across the room at you. So, there was a spread of meanings and things behind that. But to actually sit with that feedback, and accept it, and try to understand it, not to say: 'oh no we're [organisation], we're hospitable, we're all about home and family'… but if we had done that we couldn't have worked with the young people to reflect on their attitudes towards inclusion. We could only have turned it into a game… a kind of power play to say that 'this is how you should be behaving'. We couldn't have supported them to reflect… and if we want to make a difference we have to deal with reality. If we want to sell a youth work experience, then we don't need to deal with reality, we can construct our own, but if we want to actually change lives in our community, [city name], then we have no option but to start with the truth.

S – That's a really good way of putting it, isn't it… it's also about being willing to invite those critical questions and feedback.

An openness to critique, a willingness to ask curious questions but also crucially to be asked critical questions in order to be challenged to see reality, is important. Shaw and McCulloch

(2009) conclude that by creating spaces with young people and actively engaging with them in sociological imagination towards positive social change, that perhaps they may claim their stake in creating a society that is better for all. There is a sense of the practitioners grappling with challenging conversations and active engagement along these lines, and notably a discussion of inclusion, and young people's attitudes, is revealing of practice that has equity as a central consideration, not least because it is contextualised within wider perspectives.

S - So, the other thing that came out of the 'inside the building, outside intimidation' [was] who is around, what is the changing dynamics? Like actually having a chat with R from the LGBT [Project] and he came and did some training. And we've got a really high proportion of young people who are LGBT, but we can get quite complacent with that and go: 'it's obviously LGBT friendly because they find it really accepting'… and R went 'well actually there's quite a lot of other ways that you could make it more so'. Again, and us sitting up and going 'ok we need to hear that, we need to sit up'…

E – And sitting up and engaging with that challenge… you'd be well aware of the kind of controversy of same sex relationships within the church… I think one of the things [the organisation] does in that particular regard, is to provide a way in which the church can operate outside of itself and part of that is a kind of pathfinding impact… At the simplest level one of the things that R suggested was that you could get a rainbow flag and put it outside the door. Well we could, but that's not a straight-forward act. We've got a cardboard rainbow house up there. Are we prepared to put outside our door what we are prepared to have in the room? Well yeah. But it is a different act and it has different consequences. So again, it might be easiest to close this down and say let's not think about It, but that's never good enough and so what we need to do is… allow R to draw us… do what we think of as the right thing to do, in a way that doesn't ignore the other challenges that might come to us. Is that fair?

S – Yeah, and again that's an example in one direction but there are many other examples in different directions too. So, you're asking how we operate at different levels, and how we are critically aware not just of our own practice but the other factors at play.

J – Yeah, yeah,

S – And Church dynamics is one way.

E – And we would see the Church as a negatively constraining voice at that point…

S – I think the two words that I would summarise it with when we're thinking about those external partners or forces or whatever, one would be justice…if we are only dealing with individual stories and individual scenarios that are put in front of us, of course they are desperately important and of course we want to make a difference in the individual lives of young people. And if we only do that, we are just firefighting, dealing with the symptoms of the systems and structures that are creating the oppression, the poverty, the marginalisation of swathes of population in our society.

J – Okay.

S - So one key word for me is about justice, we have a role to play in social justice in society. And that does mean bringing challenge to homophobia within the Church, it does mean bringing challenge to unfair sanctions and benefit cuts, it does mean bringing challenge to the youth work sector who are becoming increasingly driven on programmes and courses. And [because] our focus is also really on relationship, [with] funders as well, as E has been talking about, you know the neoliberal funders and stuff.

J – Yes.

S - But the justice needs held in tension with the other word that I would use of journey. So all of these external forces are made up of people who are on their journeys too and actually rather than you know dissing the Church for, you know, appearing homophobic or whatever, actually how can we engage with them face to face, people to people, and include them in

the journey that we are on of discovery, and we are learning from them, and they are learning from us.

The participants clearly see possibilities for engagement that impact positively for change through the ongoing community and relationship building. Banks (2019:11) emphasises social justice and equity as the core values of community development, and she elucidates that this involves a striving for equitable 'distribution of material and social goods', with a respect for 'diversity of cultures, religions and lifestyles' and actions towards 'challenging oppressive power structures and discriminatory treatment'. There is a lot in what she is saying evident here. The participants' reflections with young LGBT+ people are grounded in their voice and implicitly in their human rights and that by definition charges the participants with a speaking outward, not just inwards. These wider acts of statement, and relationship building evidence the bringing of challenge, the potential for change, and there is a sense of that hope nurturing the participants in their journeying. There is no choice but to respond in this scenario if they frame their work as community development.

Here Freire's (2018:12) words on hope for liberation come alive again as he reminds us that 'It is necessary to fight for it, within historically favourable conditions' and that 'If they do not exist, we must hopefully labor to create them'. There is importance in the image of the participants engaging with people, to build community, that brings challenge for positive change. As Freire (*ibid*) continues 'In this context, one can realize the importance of education for decision, for rupture, for choice, for ethics at last'. Their actions are a constant nudging grounded in ethical reflections, social justice intentions and the creating of community both as a holding, nurturing space and as an agitating one.

S - Yeah, and for me it comes back again to that work of humility, yeah, we're about justice and yeah, we want to challenge the systems and structures, and we can only do so much. We need to, you know, we can't change the world and to even think we can, would be deluded. So, we do what we can, and we do it well and there's something quite liberating and

E – and that reflects where we are with the young people as well, doesn't it? We want to bring challenge, but we know that's not achieved by throwing things at them, it's achieved by being alongside them…and act in ways that can bring about transformation. It's not cause and effect, but we've seen it often enough to know that it can happen, nonetheless…

S - … I would say [always] try and make sure there are artists in your community. Because the artists are social prophets and actually if anyone is going to help keep challenging those structures, and those systems, as well as reimaging daily practice, and as well as modelling what sacrifice and cost really means, like I think artists have changed the world much, much, much, more than they are ever given credit for. And I think [the organisation] would be far poorer if there were not the number of artists around both in terms of what they do, but also in terms of the questions they ask, the challenges they bring and the way they model counter cultural values, in life.

The emphasis on arts for curiosity and questioning is briefly mentioned but stressed as an important part of the approach in this dialogue. Meade & Shaw (2007:413) point to the role of community arts as 'an important antidote to resignation and cynicism' and in moving beyond individual preoccupations towards an opening up of spaces for collective potential. There is a sense of their perspective being reflected in the comments by S as she points to the transformative potential artists bring to the community development process. It is one of many avenues they pursue in their attempts to build community that speaks out against injustice and the building of a cardboard rainbow house as a challenge to homophobia is illustrative of that. Not a static process, the dialogue it facilitates is important.

McArdle (2020:1) talks of community workers 'rocking the boat while staying in it' and in doing so paints an image that resonates here. She concludes that whilst the tactics utilised to influence for change will vary, 'positive consequences for the community' must be the given in order to 'avoid irreparable damage caused by ill-thought-out, even if well intentioned, tactics' (2020:16). There is indeed no sense of actions being reckless here, on the contrary the participants present as deeply thoughtful, perhaps tentative. For community development workers espousing a values base of equity, then hanging a rainbow flag outside might be simple consideration, however the power of the church is revealed and considered, thoughtful actions are pursued.

J – …you talk about justice and journey and you talk about 'yeah we need to challenge the structures', … why? What drives you to think about that, to do that? Why is that in what you do?

S – I think probably there's something a bit historical in that, again that was part of the roots of [the organisation] I think there was quite a justice focus back then… but I suspect there's also quite a few of us as individuals who have a personal concern and passion for that. So, for me international development has been a lifelong interest and concern and having worked a bit oversees and having seen the global injustice, or a small window of the global injustices, has again really opened my eyes and challenged my thinking locally. You don't have to go to Liberia, you don't have to go to Kathmandu to find poverty, it exists here too. And again, that I don't want to be just dealing with the symptoms, there has to be a better way.

E – Yeah, I would agree with all of that and I think there are flows through [the organisation] that have sharpened that edge in particular ways. So artistic influence is one that brings that edge of questioning, why things are the way they are and visioning, imagining a different

way of being. I think the Christian foundation and identity brings a prophetic challenge and again a prophetic imagination of seeing the world the way it is, convinced that it is not the way it should be, and with a kind of sufficiently funded imagination to see another possible world. I think the CLD [community learning & development] influence has also sharpened and funded that imagination so through the, both in the training of those of our team who are trained, and in you know, students coming through…and the experiences people have brought from different places. And I think that then ties into a fourth which is the encounter with young people, that if you meet and care about somebody who is being crushed by something, then that changes you, and that radicalises you, if you meet them, if you know them, if you love them… a fifth is the young people themselves and the alternative culture and the questioning, sometimes antagonistic culture of the young people, the challenge that they bring and this being something that is not just shaped by us but shaped by them. Each of those sharpen that edge I think and not relying on any one of them I think is important.

S – Yeah, yeah, it's quite a fusion.

Messages from the dialogue

A significant aspect of the learning from this dialogue rests in the participants' clarity around their work as creating community with young people. It is noticeable that whilst they do refer to youth work on occasions, they more readily define their work as community development. From the outset, the participants specify that their focus is not about service provision but about building community with young people so ultimately, they can lead more fulfilled lives. The apparent simplicity of this statement is revealed in its complexity as the dialogue ensues.

Strong ideological foundations of equity and mutuality demonstrate processes of encounter and engagement with young people that are nourished by humility, love, and respect. Their focus is revealed as an ongoing process of developing community through dialogue and relationships. In this way community is an evolving entity and Westoby and Dowling's (2013:5) thoughts on community as hospitality grounded in relationships that are 'welcoming of the other' provide a useful illustration.

The participants know the conceptual underpinnings of their approach and they highlight the purpose and meaning of their work regularly, demonstrating thoughtful, values-based, philosophical, and theoretically strong approaches. They are fully aware of the socio-political context they are operating in and a real strength of their approach is in the easy references to neoliberalism and its impact on welfare provision, funding, and young people's lives. Their relationship building with young people means they know the ramifications of poverty, abuse, deprivation and marginalisation and their practice is consequently fuelled with hope, and striving, for transformation. They equally know the importance of practice that has as a starting point of the world as it is, rather than an imagined place of meritocracy in which employability programmes and courses will simply transform lives, and they are willing to confront the challenges that brings in holding onto their values. The consistent references to transformation reveal practice that conceptually never loses sight of the wider need for positive social change alongside hope for better lives for, and with, individuals. There is a sense however that the latter is the more dominant aspect of their work and the building of community is in order to create a nurturing environment for and with young people that can create possibilities for politically active community development process.

This dialogue reveals deeply reflective practice, focussed on creating community with young people aiming towards individual, collective, and social transformation. The importance of building relationships with young people that are grounded in mutuality and respect

permeate everything the participants relate. They are open to learning from, and with, the young people and to similarly engage those involved in the wider community, deliberately involving politicians, academics, and policymakers in their work, to that end. The invitation to engage in community is proffered widely to those who can influence for the better, who need influencing, and ultimately to encourage commitment to a journey towards justice for and with young people.

DIALOGUE 4 - Bringing realities to the fore

Involved in a national network of organisations that focuses on women's experiences of prostitution in Scotland, the participants in this dialogue are both women, one has very lengthy community development experience and the other is new to community development.

The dialogue reveals an approach that is grounded in feminist principles and that strives to work with women to foreground their stories of their lived experiences of prostitution. Whilst there are clearly differing perspectives on feminism as it has moved through what are commonly described as waves (David 2016), and it is contested in nature (Robson and Spence 2011), the broad definition by hooks (2000:1) that: 'feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression' is revealing in its simplicity and particularly illustrative of this dialogue.

Lorde (2007:110) stresses the need to recognise difference of race between women, otherwise the 'mobilization of women's joint power' is quite simply diminished. Relatedly, hooks' definition challenges the conceptualisation of women as homogeneous and embraces the intersections of gender and class, race, ethnicity, disability, and sexuality, and this is reflective of the underpinning practice in this dialogue. The participants are clear that the women are not a homogeneous group, it is evident in the dialogue that they have different ethnicities and ages.

Moreover, the women have different experiences that lead to their involvement in prostitution, including trafficking and other forms of exploitation. That said, they also have shared experiences, notably they are women, many are mothers, they are sisters,

daughters, aunts and they are living in poverty, on the margins of society and markedly, as will be revealed, their involvement in prostitution is characterised by violence, stigma, and social inequalities. Consequently, the identities of the women remain confidential in the dialogue and the participants stress that the women have used pseudonyms throughout their involvement in the project to date, mostly because of fear of repercussions.

It is worth highlighting that the participants tend to talk about 'the women', occasionally 'girls' but never 'prostitutes'. On occasions where they particularly discuss prostitution, they prefer to use the term 'women in prostitution'. This is because as Raphael and Shapiro (2005:969) suggest this term 'does not victimise, nor does it glorify'. Significantly however, it also clearly situates the women as women first and foremost and avoids defining them by their involvement in prostitution, thereby deliberately, or inadvertently, diminishing them to a 'single story' (Adichie 2009).

The themes in this dialogue are:

- Women in control: their stories, their truth
- Writing the script together
- Learning is shared
- Invest in potential for change

Women in control: their stories, their truth.

> I am not only a casualty, I am also a warrior (Lorde 1984:30).

Lorde's words have particular resonance in this dialogue as in framing prostitution as violence against women, the participants stress the damage they see it inflicting on the women's lives, however they equally emphasise the women's strengths and vitality; both are evident throughout the women's stories. The community development practice presented here is a consciously 'purposeful process' (Banks 2019:7) that involves the telling of the women's stories using photography, a book, social media presence and a campaigning exhibition of their work. The stories are desperate, in contrast the ensuing actions strive to be transformative.

Acknowledging the painful realities of living in oppressive circumstances, the 'women in control' theme stresses the need for an approach to this project to be grounded in the women's agency. Quite frankly, the stories are not public property, they belong to the women, they constitute their experiences, their realities, their lives, and their control of them is therefore of fundamental importance. The participants are acutely aware of this and they embrace it as a guiding principle. They openly reflect on the complexities involved, as well as the ethics of their actions and those of colleagues, in striving to hold on to that premise.

J – So [name of project] if you would just tell me how you approach it and why?

N – …it was a really loose brief, it was to develop a way to engage with women for them to tell their stories and everything, and that was it, as far as it went…loads of the work that I've been involved with in the past is using creative ways to approach things… [story-telling] has always been for me a creative way of getting messages across.

J – Yes, yeah.

N - And I have been aware through my work of how other people study women and prostitution and [I] pulled together examples of photography or photographers who had

engaged with women in the sex industry, but it was very much a voyeuristic take of them as objects, subjects and not really as living people…

J - Okay.

N - I was really interested in photography as a way for women to tell their stories but for me the idea had been that this would be women in control, they would be taking the photographs. So it was a very loose brief…and [I] looked at examples of work that had been done with women who had experienced violence, looked at story telling… but I wasn't quite sure how that was going to be…talking with women…it was a very loose idea.

J – Okay, uhu.

N - I knew I had to find a photographer coz I have no photography skills… I had approached a few photography projects in [city] and spoken with them …they were very much of the idea that they would be taking the photographs of the women. So, they didn't quite get what I was meaning. And I was struggling because my preference would have been a woman…so I did a call out…and I looked up R and had a look at some of her photographs. So, she came with a recommendation, but at the same time for me I was thinking: 'will this woman be like the other photographers who find it hard to step out of the role that they would be the master?'.

J - Yeah, yes.

N- There was one person, I went to have coffee with this guy and he had bags with him and I thought 'what the hell is he doing?' and that was all his lenses that he'd brought along to show me.

J – The cameras were more important?

N – Well his tools were more important than what he was going to do, do you know?

J – It's slightly ironic, isn't it?

N – Well do you know, in my head I was going: 'do you know you are just typifying everything that we [are challenging]', notions of power and hierarchy and all of this. So, I

made contact with R. So, I had a loose idea in my head but wasn't sure how that was going to be, and it turned into a reality, really.

There was an initial brief for this project that involved working with women in prostitution and engaging in creative ways of telling their stories with photography. With a leadership role in the project, N was clear from the outset that certain principles were driving her approach. Dominelli's (1995:142) thoughts on feminist community development as a power-sharing exercise are a useful illustration of what she is grappling with throughout:

> endorsing power-sharing, collective working and redefining professionalism, requires community workers to be more accountable to the groups they work with, work more effectively collectively, share skills and develop more participatory mechanisms.

Evidently, the creative approaches using storytelling and photography opened possibilities for partnerships but the worldview of who N was prepared to work with was of crucial concern. She needed someone who was willing to engage in collective, respectful action with her and, importantly, with the women, someone who could in many ways work to Dominelli's definition above.

Accordingly, new to community development, R came to the project initially because of her photography expertise but brought much more than that. The connection the participants made on meeting each other for the first time was a catalyst for a respectful, collaborative relationship that became one of the enduring strengths of their approach.

N - I was really nervous thinking, thinking 'Oh Jesus Christ what if this is going to be, yet again'. She came bounding up the stairs and was like: 'Hi!' And you know just full of life, full of energy and I thought: 'this is different'. You know, just even that initial kind of connection. And you took me to a coffee shop. She wanted to go to a small place that was locally run by a local woman that she knew. And even that to me was going: 'Aahh, she's kind of getting the wave-length of where I'm coming from'. And we sat down and talked through ideas. I mean I don't know what you remember of that meeting but I…

R – Crying, it was awful. I phoned my mum afterwards and I was like 'oh God, I was roaring and greeting mum, and that's me arsed up again'.

N – But why were you crying, what, what were you…?

R – You were telling me the story about the attempted murder charge, no of the female brothel owner.

N – Yeah, yeah.

R – That woman was trying to escape out of the room, and she pushed her back in and closed the door and she ripped off all her acrylic nails.

N – Trying to [escape], on the carpet.

R - I'd never heard anything like it in my life, I'd never heard anything like it in my life!

N – So you didn't come with any knowledge of feminism or prostitution or violence against women.

R – Nothing like that no.

N – Yeah, it was all [new].

R – Nothing, no I'd never really thought about it, the only time I'd really thought about prostitution was when I was in Thailand and I saw, perhaps lady-boys…still at that point I didn't know about sex tourism or anything like that. So, to hear [these stories], I thought 'she's got to be kidding me on here, this can't be true'.

The participants frame prostitution as violence against women and as being grounded in gender inequalities, oppression, and exploitation, much as Dworkin (1981), Farley (2004), Raphael and Shapiro (2002, 2004), and the Scottish Government (2018) contend. It is not the intention of this research to debate the different perspectives on prostitution, however it is important to acknowledge that it is not always framed as exploitation, with some perspectives naming it as work, or as a job, and at times as empowering (see Weitzer 2005; Ahmad 2001; Fisher 1992). That said, much as Farley (2004) concludes that women in prostitution are ordinarily harmed physically, emotionally, and socially throughout their involvement in prostitution, the participants are unwavering in their perspective that prostitution is violence against women. This perspective comes from their ideological grounding but significantly also from hearing the women's stories as they voice their experiences.

The strength of this perspective from the participants unfolds as the dialogue continues and this is particularly noticeable for R. The shock that she expresses on being introduced to some of the women's stories with her acknowledgement that she had no previous awareness that women lived in these circumstances, is significant. She reflects on her role being grounded in heartfelt relationships and an openness to learning about the women's oppressive circumstances and their lived experiences of everyday violence.

Interestingly, their approach to practice aligns with Dominelli's (2011:190) contention that the traditional role of feminist community work is focussed on '*the creation of a society free of oppression of any kind'* and they are in agreement with Nixon *et al* (2002) that the act of men buying sexual favours from women is both grounded in, and made possible by, the broader societal patriarchal oppression of women.

More than this and perhaps more importantly, there is a clear focus throughout this dialogue on the participants' roles as being to hear and foreground the women's stories of their lived experiences. The reality is that in the hearing of the women's stories, the participants are listening to accounts of violence, degradation, shaming and oppression that the women experience specifically through their involvement in prostitution.

N - I remember saying to you, you will hear some really hard, difficult things in this project and what we're trying to do is to bring these realities to fore, [so] you need to know it. I remember that first meeting I was almost trying to put her off by saying: 'you have to think about your own reputation, you have to think of the risks around this…' And the more we talked the more R was going: 'Yeah, I want to do it!'

R – I remember you talking about: 'R, think about your reputation!'. And I was thinking: 'my reputation is a bit crazy anyway, so I'm not worried about that'. And you were saying: 'look imagine if a journalist gets a hold on any information about you'. And I was thinking: 'well, there's nothing really to get hold on and if anything does come out, I'll just have to apologise to my mum. She's the only person I'll need to say: 'sorry about that, I'm really sorry'.

J – So what made you want to do it? What made you want to meet N in the first place? What pulled you in?

R – [A colleague] called me and said: 'you have to meet this woman you're going to love her, she was full of sparks and nuance you could almost hear the sparks coming through the phone, you're going to love exactly what she does.'…But as soon as I heard her [N] speak, the accent, it was almost therapy for me, the way you were talking and communicating…As well as, photography for me, I'm not a commercial photographer, I'm not a wedding photographer, I can do it, but it's not really who I am as a person, you know. I like to do things that are from the heart, you know from a place where you can make a difference or

make a change, no matter what it is. I'm not a capitalist, you know I don't do things for money which is so stupid, I should be a bloody capitalist, you know, you know…and especially in that photography world that you are talking about, the ego, the lenses.

N – Yeah.

R - …so for this, this is a chance for me to step right out of the box and do something that I knew would - I didn't even know it was going to make a difference - but it was something that I could do rather than just float around taking event photography and business men in suits looking bored.

N – Mhmm.

R - And also, I didn't really need to take any pictures, of course I did something, but it wasn't the responsibility of the photography, it wasn't really down to me.

N – It was a very different role then, wasn't it?

R - Also I like teaching photography and I like women, you know, as the photographers.

Notably, throughout, the participants present their practice as striving to work alongside the women both to foreground their stories, but also to attempt to impact for broader societal understanding of their lived realities, to make a difference from the heart.

As it unfolds, this dialogue reveals practice that strives to influence change for and with women who could very easily be described as some of the most marginalised and stigmatised women in society (Narayanan & Bharadwaj 2019). Dominelli's (2011:187) contention that feminist community work puts women at the centre of practice in striving for social change because of: 'the invisibility of women's contributions, [and] the neglect of women's specific needs as women under patriarchy' is clearly represented in this dialogue, alongside practice that strives to redress this. The women are invisible in many ways, indeed

much as Rancière (2001) points to the existence of people in society who simply do not count and Tyler (2020) describes as 'social abjects', whichever lens is used, the women are on the margins of society.

This desire to make a difference is grounded in a strong sense of caring from the outset and a commitment to the women, to respectfully understanding their lived realities, and to holding them at the centre of any action.

N – And I remember Jean, I remember that first meeting with R, it was the way she spoke about the women even though she had never met them, had never worked with a group of women like this, it was all new to her, she was just so incredibly respectful. And talking about or engaging with what I was saying with her, as a woman to other women, that's what I felt, that her heart was in the right place. Do you know what I mean? It was not what she was wanting to get out of this, it was what the women might get out of it.

J - Yes, mhmn.

N - And it was the first time I think talking with somebody about ideas that, you know, R was the one who said: 'N, no matter what we do for these women, it must be beautiful'. You know, this is what I've been trying to get people to understand, do you know? And it was the first time someone else had said it. I'm thinking: 'yes, this is about the value for these women, this is about, no matter their lives might be like this, but they have to come out with something at the end that they are proud of'. And we talked about the idea of truth…and there was that agreement that this had to be the women's, and that it wasn't our role to censor them and they could be coming up with stuff that could be challenging.

R - I liked what you said at the very end of the, well the start of [one of the exhibitions launches] …that it wasn't about me or you, and that's the way it's always been. You know on social media you have to present it and it's always got names attached to it but it wasn't

about you or me or what we had done, or how we did it or, it just went straight to the women and that's the way we felt for the whole time. At the start I didn't want my name on anything, on any of the marketing, not because I wasn't proud, I was so proud. I was working and we were working for [the women].

Pyles (2019: 171) highlights the need for an 'ethical underpinning that can prioritise relationships' in community development. It is increasingly apparent in this dialogue just how important the relationship between the participants is, and notably this was the case from the outset. It is grounded in an enduring respect and care for each other, but also significantly for the women. N's reflections about her first meeting with R reveal the sense of caring, from the heart, and respect as a priority.

This is about value for these women is a statement that has profound meaning. Wahab (2003:628) contends that women in prostitution 'deserve the same protection, respect, and violence-free life as all members of society' which is a call for a more level playing field free from violence. Clearly it would be difficult to conceptualise any ethical argument against that. However, it is revealing in the contradictory nature of its demands for 'protection' implying a hierarchical view of women as passive victims who simply need 'protection and respect'. The participants are asking for much more than this because life on the margins does not need simple amelioration, much more is required. hooks (2001:87) talks of the need for a 'love ethic' describing it as the following:

> The underlying values of a culture and its ethics shape and inform the way we speak and act. A love ethic presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well.

The elements of a 'love ethic' are evident in the way the participants relate to each other and the women: *I like to work from the heart*. By that, I mean a deep sense of caring that understands the need and the hopes for a better life as a basic right. There is a real sense from the participants that they subscribe to Wahab's (2003) call for women in prostitution to live lives free from violence, however hooks' call for the right to live freely, well, and fully gets closer to their attitudes to the women.

Notably, much as I have grappled with hooks' (1989) perspective on voice, ownership, and power above, the participants were also highly reflective on this.

R – A lot of people at the start were like 'what are you doing? You're never going to go to Holyrood'. Even women [said]: 'It's their choices, the women deserve it', you know? And then after a few months they were like: 'Oh my God, you did it!' But we had no choice but to do it.

N – But that was the end goal.

R – Yeah.

N – And there was something for me about the women. It just sounds like such a cliché to say these women had nothing but really in the scale [of things], and [in] all the multiple layers of what these women have experienced, they really are not valued. I knew we were going to come out with a book of their stories, and I had a clear visual of what it had to look like, you know we didn't want it just to be a photocopy. Everything had to be valuing for these women.

R – … it was just incredible. And the images would flash up, it was almost for me like a moving book. And you could stop and take a chunk out of it. And sometimes that chunk was just about all you could handle anyway.

N – Yeah, but I think because we had such freedom that we weren't bound by things that we could [do] stuff like that. But for the women, I think whenever they saw things like that [book, framed photos], it wasn't until they seen the final products it was: 'Oh my god, this is what it's like!'. You know? And, I found that really emotional because, this sounds terrible, but you got that sense of how little it takes for these women to feel valued. And if that's all it takes for them to feel valued, then you get the sense of how bloody under-valued they've been before in their lives.

R – …so for the majority of children they have good starts where they feel empowered from a very, very young age…but…these adults they've had nothing from the start. They haven't even had any positive praise, never mind their images in the book or their images behind a frame, you know?

N – Yeah. But it was mind blowing for the women, actually.

R – It was absolutely mind blowing for them.

From the outset the participants highlight the oppression the women are subjected to, noting they 'face a wider social structure that is intrinsically violent towards them' (Narayanan & Bharadwaj 2019:103). Evidently, they recognise the stigma, damage and limitations to the women's lives and know that a recognition of it is necessary but not enough, rather, action is required. The plan to produce a book to illustrate their stories with photographs was at once about educating others but also about respecting the women in ways that were otherwise missing from their lives, and indeed from society.

Tyler (2013:3) points to dual processes and meanings of 'abjection' and 'revolt' explaining:

> the processes through which minoritized populations are imagined and configured as revolting and become subject to control, stigma and censure, and the practices through which individuals and groups resist, reconfigure and revolt against their abject subjectification.

The participants see the social abjection of the women and the ramifications of it at all levels of their lives. The need for this to be redressed is a central driver for their practice and Freire's thoughts relating love to solidarity are illustrative of the inherent challenges they face: 'this solidarity is born only when leaders bear witness to it by their humble, loving and courageous encounter with the people' (1972:100). This practice requires humility, loving kindness, and courage.

The importance of the voluntary nature of the women's participation is continuously stressed and the 'women in control' theme therefore relates predominantly to the women being in control of the stories they tell and the messages they are giving, indeed how and whether they tell their stories, at all. Furthermore, with their photographs and stories as the central cog in this project, there is symbolic meaning in their control of the taking of the photographs that is reminiscent of Gramsci's (1986) concept of counter hegemony. As the participants stress the objectification of women in prostitution and the *voyeuristic take of them as objects, subjects*, Tyler's (2013) thoughts on the processes of social abjection or of 'revolting subjects' simultaneously engaged in revolting, come alive. Their photos are beautiful but challenging to view, their stories are stark descriptions of their lived realities and their collective message presents a counter to the common-sense narrative that women in prostitution are unworthy. The women as photographers presents a symbolic challenge to the oppressive images that they are usually subjected to and the subjects of.

Principally, the participants have investment in recognising and countering these processes of societal abjection and in working with the women to do so. They are engaging in practice that explicitly values the women as they learn about their perspectives, their stories, and their truths. This, they suggest, is particularly important because of the nature of the women's difficult life circumstances: living in poverty, being involved in prostitution and drug use, and having very little control over any aspects of their lives; they are subjected to stigma and social abjection. The emphasis on women's choice was therefore constantly reiterated.

N - To be quite honest for some of the women they were happy with anything going in [the book]: 'I told you this, anything can go in!'.

J – That's a huge amount of trust, isn't it?

N – Absolutely, but I think as well because we said so often to the women, it was 'you are in control, this is your choice' and so if you think about how often we said to the women 'choice, consent, control, are you consenting to this, are you sure you are okay with this, now you might be happy with this now but are you going to be in a while later?'. So, there would be that process.

J – So you would keep reiterating that?

N – The whole time through. I mean I look through emails, back and forwards to some of the women and thinking: 'My God, I bore myself' because so much of it is now: 'This is your choice, you do not have to do this, the power lies with you, blah de blah', so that was running through it the whole time.

J – You are not theorising their opinions, it's their stories, they are what they are?

N – And also that's why I was really clear, I mean if we put the women's stories out there I didn't want them as case studies, I didn't want them as: 'and then E told me this, this is what she said, [this is] my analysis of what she said', I actually just wanted it to be their words.

J – Yeah.

N - Not my interpretation of their words. I wanted it to be, to sound like them, to still sound like them, to have their words that they use, their phrases that they use, it is their voice.

J – Yes.

N - E, whenever she first saw the book, she found that really emotional. Actually, coz even although we'd done all that…whenever she actually seen it, she was like: 'Oh my God I remember saying that, I remember saying that, I remember saying that!' And I was going 'of course, it's your story, it's your voice'. But even though we said that, seeing it was really powerful for her actually: 'Oh my God that's me, that is me!'.

J – Not N's version of me?

N – No it was her, she was more horrified because I kept curse words in!…So I think it would have been very easy, not easy, it would have been difficult, but you could've written a book about what the women said. And other books have been written like that, but for this, this was, we wanted the truth. And, again, coming back to what was truthful, it had to be their voices, not the spin out.

Much as hooks' (1989:22) stresses that 'speech about the 'other' annihilates, erases', the importance of the women's voiced experiences being at the centre of this project was continuously emphasised. The need for checking in with the women with regards to what they wanted to do, say and include in the book is significantly grounded in respectful practice, but it is also an acknowledgement that the women know better, they are the experts on their lives and on their stories.

There are however sensitivities involved in the women telling their stories and Banks' (2019:26) suggestion that community development practice requires a 'constant process of negotiating and renegotiating' of consent is important:

N - …we have not been understated about this project at all, these women's stories and photographs are worthy of much more than that. But you know we didn't censor the women. No, that's wrong to say, that's completely wrong to say. One of the women wanted to put forward a photograph that I felt could be damaging for her.

J – Okay.

N – As in she showed evidence of drug use in her photograph... cos heroin was a huge part of her story. And I really, really deliberated around that and I thought 'if that goes out that will become the focus of that woman's life and story, and that's what the media will be interested in… it is a huge part of that woman's story, but she's involved in services, she has a child, if somebody works out who she is and that's her photograph, what's the repercussions for her?' So, I sat down with her and I said: 'I know it's a big part of your story but is there another way we could tell that?... if you want to show that, is there a way that you could symbolise it? Is there a way that we could just fold up tin foil that's not actually of that?'.

J – It's symbolic?

N – It's symbolic. So, she got where I was coming from. But so, whenever I said there was no censoring, that was an example where I did censor something.

J – But that sounds to me that it is founded in respect, rather than anything else?

N – Yeah, and she might be happy with putting that out in public but once it's out in public.

J – She's no control over it.

N - Or she's no control over how people might use that. And also, if somebody did work out exactly who she was and that this photograph has been taken at this time in her life, it could

have really negative consequences for her and her child, and I just felt that that was too big a risk. So, she might be happy with it now, but she might not be in the future. So, we worked with alternatives for that.

J – So it was like a safeguarding, I think, isn't it?

N – Yeah. So, whereas we could say to the women you have freedom, I mean there was things that I did have to change, d'you know? Like one woman talked very identifying things about her family, that if somebody knew they would go: 'Jesus it could only be her'. So, whilst that was an important part of her story, we had to change parts of it, because, and explaining to her why and going: 'but you are actually including your family in your story and they may not be happy to be included. And if they are not happy what impact might that have on your relationship?'. So, there was boundaries around things, it wasn't just a total free for all, d'you know? Some things had to change… you know, we can talk about consent, we can talk about choice, we can talk about control, but I can't guarantee that for these women ten years in the future, you know…

There is a strong thread of ethical considerations throughout this dialogue. Narayanan and Bharadwaj (2019:103) point to the multi-layered nature of ethical considerations in community development with 'sex workers', asking: 'whose ethics counts?' They suggest that when women in prostitution are viewed as victims striving for a better life, then the stigma against them is lesser, they are more acceptable to society. Less so when they are strong about their rights and have agency as 'sex workers'. In this context the participants face ethical dilemmas and tread a fine line. The woman's desire to include a photo that clearly depicts heroin use because of its inextricable link to her story is a strong, bold statement of her truth but the potential for her to be vilified for it was a real danger.

Dialogue, compromise, and difficult decisions are constant elements of this practice approach and sometimes the decisions were difficult, but sometimes the ethical decision to be made was clear as day.

N - And that's why, you've heard the story about one woman [who] withdrew her story and took her story out, and she panicked…the night before we were due to launch and I was coming back in the train from Holyrood, I just got phone calls from her screaming and crying down the phone. And I was going: 'look, I can't talk to you just now, I'm on a really busy train, I'm not trying to shut you up, we can text each other, but I cannot talk to you'. But she wanted to [talk], so by the time I got off there were about fourteen voicemail messages from her. And I said: 'right we're going straight back to the office right now, we'll deal with it, we will deal with this, do not panic, it will be done'.

J – Is that when you ripped the story out?

N – The next day I had to rip it out but that night I had to get back into the office and remove all reference to her in the blog, remove all reference to her from the photographs, Facebook, from everything, it had to go… And I can understand the fear that that woman experienced.

J – Yeah.

N – And her fear was they would, people would track her down and kill her. Now, people outside might go 'oh Jeez, really?' Well no.

J – It is reality.

N – Absolutely, it is reality for some of these women! It's interesting now she wants her story included again and I've said to her: 'let's just give it a bit of time. That was right for you at that time and nothing has really changed in the circumstances for you. So, it can go back in, but I want you to think about this, and I'm concerned you might be caught up in the hype around it a bit, but there will be chances for you. You can come back. The door is not closed, it is always open'. But that was a really interesting, and a huge learning, because she knew

the whole way through. She knew about the book, she knew about all that and sticking true to the notion of consent, control, choice, she did have all of those right up until that end point.

J – Uhu.

N - I will be honest I was going: 'Oh My God!' you know? But that's what we've got to do. And, also, thinking: her story, I think would have been hugely significant for people's understanding of the realities. Em, do you know, her experience is very different from the other women's and it would have really shown up the idea of removing all the legislation around pimping and brothel keeping, I think it would have shown how that's based on a falsehood, you know? But if she chooses to share it in the future, we can come back to it, but just right now, just not at this moment in time.

J – Actually, in some ways that's really significant that it's the woman in that situation who had felt compelled to withdraw her story, because of fear.

N - Repercussions of what might have happened to her.

J – And that's the message, that's really strong.

N – And if you knew her story, that could be quite a distinct possibility, you know.

J – Yes, yeah.

'Of course, I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger' (Lorde 2019:30). The danger for the women is real in moving from silence to action and the relationship the participants develop with them is clearly grounded in respect for this, in care, indeed in a love ethic (hooks 2001).

Wahab (2003:626) claims that 'most feminist theories on sex work have typically alienated female sex workers from participation in knowledge creation about their lives'. However,

what is prominent here is a commitment to the women, and to working with them in foregrounding what they wanted heard, as their versions of their truth. What is also clear here is their sense that this practice requires the ability to see and act beyond self-interest, but also beyond a commitment to societal learning, the woman's story had to be removed. The women and their control of the messages is the leveller for any action undertaken, or not.

hooks (2001:93) highlights that:

> Cultures of domination rely on the cultivation of fear as a way to ensure obedience…Fear is the primary force upholding structures of domination… It promotes the desire for separation, the desire not to be known. When we are taught that safety lies always with sameness, then difference, of any kind, will appear as a threat. When we choose to love, we choose to move against fear – against alienation and separation.

The fear is a reality and the participants are acutely aware of the dangers facing the women in the telling of their stories. Bringing realities to the fore means emphasising their personal stories and acknowledging their political nature, emphasising gender inequalities, and framing prostitution as violence against women, but this cannot happen unless the women are happy to share their stories. They have control right up to the end when the beautiful and truthful book is not sacrosanct, and a story is torn out of it before an exhibition launch event.

As Urie *et al* (2019:94) suggest, the danger of 'mis-stepping is considerable', meaning that the women's voiced experiences of prostitution could easily be swamped by the participants' want to highlight their versions of the injustices in their drive to impact for positive social change, however good their intentions. The participants are highly reflective of this potential,

discussing with openness the importance of respecting the women's perspectives, choices and their voiced, lived experiences. They are together on this, but it is revealed in its complexity, this is challenging work, and much of the challenge is in maintaining the dynamic that the women are in control.

Writing the script together

The participants stress the 'unknowing' in terms of how the project might unfold, whilst being clear about the broad parameters. This is the freedom to engage with each other, and the women, in dialogue to develop the direction as they go along, in a journey with each other, and this is a strong central premise the participants regularly revisit. Dialogue is central to their practice and to their relationships with the women as they check in about the women's stories and the action they are taking. As hooks (2003) emphasises, it allows for connections across difference.

N - I mean you did say R there, I mean I had lived with these transcripts for months, every day. I'd been working with them and going over them again and hearing the women's voices again, breathing that, and you didn't spend that time with the transcripts because that wasn't your role.

J – So did you interview the women, and then? So, what was the process?

N – I interviewed the women, well, with different women it was slightly different Jean. Like some of the women I would just have a couple of text messages before I met with them…with some of the women, their interviews never ever happened, you know. So, in terms of overall I would be the one who would sit with them and interview them…or talk with them rather than interview…they would be sent off to a transcriber and then I would get the

transcripts back. Then I would go through the transcripts …they would go back to the women again… we'd always have a meeting and go through it as a kind of priority.

J – Okay.

N - I would make decisions, I absolutely did coz I thought, if that stays in for that woman someone will know exactly who she is, so bits like that would be changed to protect their identity. And then going through with the women, bits that they want included, bits that they didn't want included… 'that's a bit we've talked about already or there's a bit more needed to be added to that'. So, then I would look at the flow of their story and… change it into the flow and then go back to the women… But you know I'm thinking of W's.

R – I'm thinking of her too, yeah.

N - Coz hers was, the 53 687 words and then to get that down and I had a week in which to do it coz her time frame was a lot shorter. And honestly it was every day and then I'd go back and check in with her: 'version 14…does it sum it up for you?' So, I mean it was very intense with their stories but that meant that whenever it came to talking about it, it was all there, coz I'd lived it, breathed it for so long.

The detail is important, the relationships, the dialogue, the checking in again and again with the women to see if the developing version of their story is right. This is revealing of the complexity of relationships that community development process requires. Banks (2019:23) points to 'relationship work' as a central principle in community development, describing it as 'engaging in dialogue with others…through emotion, identity and reason work'. Her thoughts are helpful in illuminating what N is describing as she lives and breathes the women's stories but does not lose sight of her own ethical judgement and the bigger picture that connects the women across difference and similarities and the context of injustices, they are operating in.

N – …it's a very intimate project because whilst the [Network] wanted, whilst they wanted work done, it was up to me and R what that was going to be, and we had to work really closely together. Now at the start, I wouldn't say we were formal with each other, but we were quite polite with each other…we were building a relationship and getting to know each other, not testing each other out but kind of sharing wee bits about ourselves, not sharing other bits, just finding our feet with each other.

J – Yeah.

N - And then there was one day when one of the women I had interviewed was coming to meet with R and myself to look at her story, and to talk through ideas for the photographs. This woman was having a particularly hard time…she didn't turn up…but R just came in a flurry of colour into the office and with her box and her bags hanging off her. But because [the woman] didn't turn up it meant that R and I had a bit more time, and I think that was the day that barriers broke down because we were as giddy as anything.

R - Kinda: 'will she come? Is she coming, is she not coming, what are we going to do?'

N - But we talked about ideas…We had to set up Instagram that day, use our time, but it just felt like, for me, we were together on this.

R - Yeah, to set up the Instagram account, I was like: 'don't you worry N, I'm a social media guru, I'll set up Instagram'. And immediately forgot the code! So, I had to set the whole bloody thing up again…

N - But there was something about that, suddenly it felt safe to make mistakes and for trust to go: 'things are going to go wrong and it's not going to be your fault, it's not going to be my fault, this is the nature of this'. I think that was a really pivotal day on going: 'do you know, whatever comes our way, we're just going to have to rock with it'.

R – Yeah.

N – And whilst it might be this great idea on paper that we were going to engage with sixteen women in four cities across Scotland, we will bring them together to do group work

workshops together, and then we'll bring them together in a large group possibly with a residential coz that's what you used to do youth work – you know all of that went out the window.

R – Yes.

N - And it felt like we were writing the script for this because what we thought might work, all of that went out the window, so…we are just going to have to take these knocks and roll with it. Any notion of timeframes is going to have to slip and all of this is going to have to slip. But it kinda felt for me, and it's one of the learnings of the project, how intense it was...you have to factor in the relationship. I could not have done this project with somebody who, whose heart wasn't in it. It would have been a project, but it wouldn't have been the same project.

R - And I think that what happened with you and I is that even though we had no idea of who each other were or are, or what your past is or what you've done, we kind of both quickly respected each other ... so, you trusted me immediately to come up with: 'well what about this?… We'll just do it!'

N - Yeah…and it came the running joke between us.

N&R together – I've got an idea!

N - But I think that's part of it because if you are engaged with people you are never sure what's going to come back. And you're never sure what direction this has to go in, so if you close the doors early on in this kind of piece of work you are putting it into a box but there's no box it's going to fit into because it's not really been done before. So, you have to be prepared to learn from each other, but you have to be prepared to go, right Jesus we'll just try that.

J - Let's just go for it?

N – Let's just try it and because we're not quite sure but our guts are saying that this might be the right way. So, in the early days it was this, lots of ideas around, stuff down on paper, stuff was all changing and developing. For me it was a really exciting project and it did

remind me of work that I'd been involved in in the 90s where it had that freshness to it, it had that energy behind it, it had that sense of: frick almost anything's possible!

J – Yes.

N – Do you know what I mean? There's no resources around it, but anything might be possible with this.

This is important: '*there's no box it's going to fit in'* does not mean it is entirely made up as it goes along with no expertise. However, it does mean that where it goes and how it is developed is not controlled by workers from the outset because they can't know what will be right. It has to be developed in process, with each other, and with the women. Consequently, this means the 'script', so to speak, must be written and developed as you go along, allowing for a creative dynamic and mutual bringing of ideas to develop the project. Banks (2019:29) words are instructive here:

> For community development work requires not just knowledge and skills, but also the commitment to a set of idealistic values, an ability to handle inevitable contradictions and dilemmas, to be creative and empathic and engage in the constant but often hidden labour of ethics work in highly politicised contexts in which inequities are endemic and entrenched.

The participants are working with women who have extremely challenging life circumstances and experience entrenched injustices. Whilst they do reflect on a process in which they did not necessarily know what to do next, or how things might pan out, or the impact the work might have, or even whether women would turn up and engage, there is no sense of recklessness to their practice. On the contrary, this dialogue reveals thoughtful practice that is grounded in a valuing of, and respect for, each other and for the women, a framing of the

women's experiences as revealing injustice, a deep sense of care for the women and for each other, and a commitment to developing active work, in relationship, that will flow and develop as it goes. This way it has the potential to make the women's truths visible. This is important, there were plans and objectives for the project, there were clear ideological underpinnings to it, but flexibility was necessary and the accepting of an unknowing important.

Such an approach requires relationships that are open to flowing, to being respectful and engaged, but also importantly grounded in ethical considerations that are fundamentally grounded in the 'personal as political' (Millet 1969). hooks (1993:148) words are ever usefully illustrative of this: 'our lives must be a living example of our politics' and in this case 'our work'. It would not do to insist on following the early plan that probably secured the funding, it wasn't right for the women.

N - But the core for me is that we never lost sight of [was] that we wanted to do the best for the women and it was: 'what could be the best for the woman?'…we considered really tiny details in the project. For example, (to R) you had said 'we want this to be beautiful, we want this to be truthful', and those are the kinda two core elements that underpinned everything around it…when we were setting up the exhibition in Holyrood, we took a long time… I think that reflected for me what was going on with the project was: we may not have a great deal available to us but what we had, it had to be done really well. You know so 'how does this mask look? how does that look?'. I mean I remember you setting up the table and everything was like perfect … And so, for me, this was one of the reasons it was a really exciting piece of work…we might get egg on our face, em, it might never work, it might go completely belly up, you know.

R – It might all fall off the wall, all the frames might break, they might not be there, anything from people's responses, anything could happen right up to the last minute, you know?

N – And we do laugh about there being tears throughout this project, Jesus there was, there really genuinely was, and in a way sometimes I think, even if you are doing work around violence against women or you are doing work around child abuse…I mean like whenever you're doing work with young people…see that wee voice that says there's something wrong, it probably is wrong, so you've got to listen to that gut instinct.

R – Yeah.

N - But so much of our work has become so professional, and yes it has to be, but we've lost something around: 'where's that coming from?' coz that's where your learning is. And I felt in this project the two of us were going, 'mmn it doesn't feel right, that…' or 'in my gut I know this is going to be right' or 'in my gut I feel that this is the way to do it'. So, it was quite lovely to have a piece of work where it was not going: 'so which model, exactly, were you following?' You know there were ideas around that but there was incredible freedom and because we had incredible freedom, I think we transferred that to the women.

Beautiful and truthful, sentiments that sum up much of the project, reflect a sense of caring alongside a striving for the women's experiences to be heard and both are visible throughout the dialogue. This is interpreted as being for the women.

There is a sense of relief in N's thoughts on the freedom of journeying with and using dialogue to build relationships, discuss, reflect, and plan ways forward, whilst not knowing, ultimately engaging community development process. The acknowledgement that this comes from the absence of a restrictive model is important but so are her thoughts on trusting gut feelings. Seal (2014) expresses concern about perspectives on practice that suggest it is somehow intrinsic. The comments from N about listening to gut instinct and

trusting if an approach feels right or not, are open to the criticisms of practice as anti-intellectual and instinctual (Craig 2011; Seal 2014; Ledwith 2016). Seal (2014:15) found that 'workers made claims to just 'know' the needs of their young people' and concluded that such an approach is flawed for 'resorting to the magical'. Aside from the surprising language of ownership used here, he is raising important points about the limitations of claiming to know what people's best interests are. What is important in this dialogue however is that there is complexity to what is being said as N refers to listening to 'that wee voice inside' as part of her broader approach with a sense of 'practical wisdom' (Ross 1995) at play. She connects it to being in relationship, paying acute attention to what the women are saying and doing, to working closely with R, to 'identifying and focussing on the ethically salient features of a situation' (Banks 2019:22) and to critical reflection. The freedom to do this and not be restricted by professional models is a vitally important consideration.

The debates about professionalisation and community development are not new, but they remain contemporary (Ife 2016; Kenny 2014; Batsleer 2013; Banks 2004, 2019). The unease that not knowing what might come next in the project could be framed as 'unprofessional' is however of some concern. The very nature of developmental practice is that it unfolds and flows and that it cannot be boxed and controlled, indeed it ought not to be. This is community development as unfolding practice with the ability to try it out and see, this is a call for community development practice that allows for bumps and mistakes and realities and impact, not practice that comes in controlled, ready-made packages. The relationships, the dialogue and the working together develop the pieces of work within a wider awareness of the context of inequalities driven by values of mutuality, respect, self-determination, and justice.

Seal (2014:16) elucidates that: ‘There is traditionally a lot of emphasis placed on values in this work, which is good, but the important thing is how these values are mediated’. Importantly, in this dialogue, the gut feeling is also grounded in values.

N -…some of the women talked about the importance of photography for them. So again, it was the idea of thinking this could work but not being one hundred percent sure that it would…I think that actually photography was the right thing to land upon… [to R] you were really clear from the start that this was camera phones because we didn’t have the budget, nor could we buy women cameras, so it had to be something accessible.

R - Yes.

N - But also, I think in the current climate so many people take photographs and for a lot of the women they’re used to taking photographs of themselves but highly sexualised photographs.

R - Yeah.

N - So they were used to the idea of a photograph or taking a photograph, but this was turning it into something very, very different for them. So, if you had done this project ten years ago and people didn’t have camera phones you would not have gone for photography, but something about the current timing of photography to tell a story.

R - I was thinking: ‘I will go in and I will show them how to do the rule of thirds’ and ridiculous because the girls were just like, really, had a really, really, really, amazing perspective, every single one of them. It wasn’t like any of them were taking out of focus blurry, crappy images some of my friends take on a camera phone (and I’m not judging them, it’s just they all seem to). And I was like well I don’t need to teach them anything, my role really here is to collect images, print them and put them in the frame, you know?

N – Yeah, but your role was much more than that.

R - Oh, I know that, but I just mean more like they didn't need a photography [lesson] I was thinking they'd need a photography [lesson].

J - They didn't need a lesson?

R - No they were just so quick on the phones, really quick.

N - But also because you were so positive to them. Do you remember the day with K, we just went round the room we were in, and just to start taking photographs, and all of us done it?

R -Yeah!

N - … all four of us we just went round and it was like: 'just go round this room and anything at all, just take a photograph' and then we all looked at them together.

R - Yeah.

N - But [we] got quite excited about what each other was doing, and very positive about what each other was doing. But you had guided us within that…you were going: 'oh that's brilliant, that's great, you know maybe, can we try it like this, can we try it like this?'

R - Yeah.

N - So it gave women the freedom to experiment.

R - And to be told it's good.

N - Yeah, that's it, that's it.

R - It's good! And if you get told your picture is good, it's the best thing in the world, it's like: 'God that's good!'.

N - So you didn't go and say: 'oh the composition is wrong'.

R - No.

N - 'And the rule of three'.

R - Yeah, yeah.

N - It was all this real sense of positivity for them which meant, I believe, they walked out of that room thinking: 'I can take photos' not: 'Oh jeez, I've got to remember this will have to be a third of the way down my frame'.

R - Yeah.

N - Or 'what's in the background', you know what I mean? They weren't bound by rules, it was more: 'I can already do it, so I'm going out now to play with it'.

Working together in a small group, the participants and women engage in positive recognition with each other, sowing the seeds for further development work. Emejulu and Bronstein's (2011:284) articulation of these processes as central to feminist community development have useful eloquence, as they suggest that:

> By taking part, many women, especially those on the margins, from minority ethnic backgrounds or from rural areas, build their self-confidence, learn new skills, serve as role models for other women and help support other women to develop their capacity. The personal development taking place among some women in these micro-level spaces should not be minimized, since this is a cornerstone of feminist community development.

Indeed, the actions in micro level spaces ought not to be underestimated, and in this dialogue, they are demonstrated to be of enormous importance. Interestingly, whilst the participants clearly situate the micro actions within a broader political and educational process, Emejulu and Bronstein go on to suggest that this kind of community development process is challenging:

> The problem, however, is translating individual women's personal development and advancement into concrete political outcomes and victories that support different kinds of women's interests (*ibid*).

Responding to these inadequacies of practice, in this situation the positivity and achievements together paved the way for moving forwards in taking photos as a catalyst for voicing the women's stories. The skill of photography was the tool for professional development and expression of stories, but also much more, it was part of the process of writing the script together that ultimately had political grounding. This is connected to the way the relationships were building and the importance of how the participants engage respectfully with the women as equal human beings.

N - …and if I look at stuff that the women said, like K, for example.

R - (takes an audible deep sigh).

N - I know, look at the two of us, oh God!

R - That lassie! (said with warmth).

N - I know, you know when I first met her, she had barriers and barriers and barriers, and layers and layers and layers. And whenever she decided to become involved in the project…I wouldn't say she was cold, but she was very guarded. And then the first time she met you, there was you, I, K, and her support worker. And she [saw] in that meeting that we were really positive, and we were being enthusiastic [not just] about the project, but about her. And that was the first time she said she'd had anybody who gave that to her.

R - (another deep sigh)

N - But I mean I knew what we were being like, we were being like us.

R - Yeah.

N - But now taking a step back going, because we were so invested in the potential of it… that transferred through to her, do you know what I mean? She was going 'oh my God, I could do all of this, all of this could happen'. Whereas if we had went in much more formal - I mean you can't do that when you are engaging with people on something like this …

R - The return on the photography came back really quickly, didn't it… like they would just go and then the images would be there in the next few days… E, for example, she went home and just started sending images within two hours. The return on the photography was quick and that's how you knew it caused a positive reaction, like: 'I have to do this, I want to do this'.

N – 'I want to do this'.

R – 'I really want to do this'.

N - …coz we said to the women: 'you can do whatever you want to do, you can explore this'. Almost they could play with what they wanted to do. [It was] not us going 'now you need to have it like this, it must be like this…they weren't given those boundaries around it, it was up to them, you know?

R -…and there was examples as well, if we were looking through a transcript, we'd talk about certain elements of the transcript and say: 'how do you think you would best represent this?'

N – Yes.

R - But not saying 'this is what this is, do that'. It was up to them to represent, and then they didn't have to do that either…If they were needing more guidance, maybe. So there was that freedom and also an element of guidance…they took the guidance really quickly and that's what I was trying to suggest about, the women in my photography club are amazing but they are more 'what do you mean, why?' questioning.

N – Looking for the right way.

R – Whereas the women just seemed to just do it.

J – Yeah, why do you think that?

R – I had a theory.

N – I think it was something new for them.

R – I also had a theory; I've made this one up.

N – Go for it.

R – Em, a lot of the women talk about when they are with a punter, they have this ability to switch off and go into a different world. And I wonder if years and years of switching off and going into a different world and into that realm made it easier for them to access that again in order to take the pictures…So I was wondering about a connection between the women being able to shut themselves off and take them into another place was the reason why some of these images are so incredible. Because they could move into that place quicker than women that don't have to do that. Does that make sense…?

N - Well you're sitting on a green sofa and V, one of the women, she talks about really quite horrific things happening to her, and she talked about an attempted murder on a green sofa. But almost in her own telling of that part of her story she focussed on the visual.

R - Yes!

N - And this is what a lot of people who are experiencing trauma, traumatic situations, focus on a thing. But she happened to focus on the visual things, about the boots, she could remember the boots on the dashboard the first time she saw a punter.

Whatever the explanation for the women's abilities to photograph their quick engagement is reminiscent of Freire's (2016) suggestion that people will of course engage when it is right for them and they are not confronted with externally imposed agendas. The photographs become codifications as the women know or decide what aspects of their lives they want to

represent and begin to ‘question why situations are accepted as normal’ (Ledwith 2016:68). The participants are engaged with them in a mutual learning process.

N - …and I think what we tried with the work was to keep it very level.

J - What does that mean?

N - In that I was not there with all the answers and R was not there imparting her knowledge, you know? We tried one workshop, we did try one workshop, two of the women turned up but we were as much participants as we were workshop leaders. So, any exercise that was being done, R and I done it with the women and talked through what we shared with the women so it wasn’t: ‘now can you please do that’. We were going through an experience with these women at the same time.

R – Yep.

N - …but that’s a key for me that in order for these women to feel safe with us they had to see us as not N the leader, R the photographer, it had to be N & R. There was not the sense of ‘we are imparting our wonderful knowledge unto you’. It was more that we are going through something together. And constantly with the women we were saying ‘this is all new, we are trying this, we are all on this journey together’. And… we talked very much about journeys with the women and paths and routes and this was just the way we talked but we were as much part of that journey with the women as they were.

‘Journeying with’ requires the ability to step out of your need to be the expert in a situation and to open your mind to the expertise that exists within others, thus experiencing more a process of mutuality and collaboration. Batsleer (2013:20) emphasises the need for ‘the sense of equality in relationships to be genuine and not feigned’ and she goes on to suggest this is facilitated by ‘courageous and authentic conversation’. R’s quick realisation that she did not need to be a didactic teacher in this situation is important. Grounded in respect and a

growing understanding of feminism and gender inequalities, R adapts her thinking to work with the women guided by them, or '*to keep it level'* as N describes. This is an important acknowledgement that the women are not empty vessels, they are equal human beings as capable of learning and engaging politically as anyone else, much as Rancière (2001) highlights. Writing the script together is therefore founded on this premise of mutuality.

This is community development practice as journeying with people in communities and it is revisited in different parts of the dialogue. The participants describe journeying with the women as they hear their stories of their lived realities and as they work out together how best to represent their stories, together in mutual endeavour:

J - There's something that you're saying about respect: 'it was a chance to be respected in telling your story and to really be heard', and how that could've been different.

N – Mhmn, absolutely.

J - So there's something about the way that you have worked with each other and with the women, doing what did you call it, did you call it levelling?

N - Yeah.

J -That, that sounds to me like it has been fundamentally important, throughout?

N – Mhmn, and I've got stuff to bring to this, and the women have stuff to bring to this, and R has stuff to bring to this.

J – Yeah, and you all do.

N – And with the women we would be honest with them and say: 'we're not quite sure how this is going to go', you know what I mean? And 'you will shape this and this will happen with this'… but you know it just strikes you that if you are thinking about [other workers] coming in…whatever they are going to spend with the women they won't necessarily have the

chance to build up a really close relationship. But it's what you bring to that table that's really, really, important, and how those women see you, do you know what I mean? And like, R has food, we always fed, feed the women…

R - There was always food, the [project] buffet, it was the only hashtag!

N - …that's part and parcel of it because that's about valuing the women and them coming in and there being nice food, comfortable, you know, the very basics.

J - Yes, yeah.

R - And always making them cups of tea and cups of coffee.

N - Yeah, 'do you need a wee ciggy break?' and all of these kind of things for them.

R - And laughs as well.

N - Oh humour.

R - Loads of humour you know.

N - And we'd be laughing at each other you know what I mean? And there was humour there would be high emotion but there would be humour, absolutely there's times we'd be belly aching laughing at loads of things.

R - Laughing, yeah.

N - But the humour was like a valve and for the women they had a valve as well, you know? And Jean I remember after the women would leave and R and I would just look at each other and just go 'oh my god'.

R - 'Oh my God'.

N - Or there would be times I'd be sitting talking with the women and I'd be seeing out of the corner of my eye R's face coz this women might be describing the most horrific things and very often in very matter of fact ways. But I'd be looking and talking with her and out of the corner of my eye I'd see R and so conscious of R, is R alright with this? You know and there's something about the human element.

R - I was crying.

N - And we would say to the women: 'you know this is tough this is really hard', not being like a robot sitting there cold[ly]: 'tell us your story'.

R - No. There was lots of hugs as well with everyone, wasn't there? Hugs.

N – Yeah and checking in, like W didn't like to be hugged [at first] and it was like, are you ok with this? And before [one of the exhibitions' launches] and a couple of women who were going, I said: 'I won't be hugging you just because I'll be treating you like other people' and I'd just be aware of that. We went outside and she said: 'can I have a hug now?'- 'Yes, you can!'.

The genuine, honest engagement with the women is revealing of practice that cares and comes from the heart. There is no sense of a distant, 'professional pretend' acceptance of the women or even a neutral stance. This is community development practice that is engaging, in relationship with, and operating from a truthful place that both cares and expresses that care, and ultimately it is on the side of, it is partisan by nature (Scott 2012).

There being no sense of a distant neutrality is reminiscent of Horten's words in dialogue with Freire (Bell *et al* 1990: 102) in which he suggests that adopting a neutral status is 'an immoral act' that has 'nothing to do with anything but agreeing to what is and will always be…just being what the system asks us to be'. This he suggests is problematic because it means adopting a stance that avoids challenging social injustice. So 'you've got to take sides', he states, and it is of utmost importance that this is done in full recognition of why you are doing so (*ibid*). In other words, by sitting alongside the women, hearing and importantly believing their stories, understanding them without pathologising them, and knowing this is from a feminist perspective, the participants are driven to take action.

Horton and Freire go on to agree that a neutral stance sides with the oppressor rather than the oppressed and that the need is for structural change rather than ‘changing hearts of people’ (1990:103). Connected to this, hooks’ (2001:87) further talk of embracing a love ethic in life points to a letting go of ‘our obsession with power and domination’ and it ‘presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well’. Framing this as a societal process, she relates it to the power of white people speaking out about racism and to the power of challenging patriarchy in order to end violence against women. The transformative power of love, she continues, requires courage to speak out, connect and act. hooks (2001:101) suggests the elements of a love ethic are: ‘showing care, respect, knowledge, integrity and the will to co-operate’. This is evident in the participants’ dialogue as they reveal an attitude to the women that demonstrates these qualities throughout.

Notably, Batsleer (2013) suggests that a feminist analysis of violence against women leads to practice that is not grounded in immediate crisis-led responses. She highlights the exhausting and flawed nature of a case work approach to women, one of ‘patching them up in order to send them deeper and deeper into a war not of their making’ (2013:142). Framing this approach as ameliorative, she points to the strength of a community work being in ‘its recognition of the prevalence and normality of violence, while continuing to stress its unacceptability’.

Indeed, the participants are presenting practice that is grounded in the elements of a love ethic combined with the recognition of violence, marginalisation, and oppression of women as unacceptable. Dominelli (1995:136) contends: ‘Social change is the ultimate aim of feminist social action’ and again the participants are calling for this, importantly this is their underpinning ideology, but the women and their stories take centre stage. The women’s voices will not be used to push for social change, the love ethic keeps them at the centre of practice and the way forward is decided together. This is a powerful combination.

Learning is shared

When grounded in Freirean thinking, the learning at the centre of community development is commonly framed as transformative, as developing critical consciousness and as conscientisation (Ledwith 2016; Buchroth & Parkin 2010). This is often connected to processes of working alongside people in communities to encourage questioning of the taken for granted aspects of life with a view to challenging for social change. Emejulu (2011) is critical of one-sided processes that assume the worker enjoys agency that community members lack. It is interesting to note that one of the key aspects of learning evident in this dialogue relates to it as a mutual process.

This dialogue notably represents community development in which all involved are learning. Thus, learning as a central theme was evident not just in the participants' descriptions of the women's learning processes but significantly in their reflections on their own learning, as well as pointing to wider learning amongst those who see the exhibitions and read the blog. From the early stages of the dialogue, participant T was particularly open about her own steep learning curve. New to working with community development, she was clear about her engagement in the project providing her with learning in numerous different ways.

R -…a lot of the time I felt that I was the one that was sitting there learning something more than anybody else, you know.

N - But we all were.

R - I know but it was like coming in waves with me and it was just like, I had no idea what was going on in the world really and I thought I was quite worldly wise….You know I think that a lot of the time it was the biggest learning lesson for me, a learning curve, about how

women are treated in society even though you know they are treated pretty badly you know but not to that extent.

The learning for the participants was a growing awareness, and deepening understanding, of prostitution as violence against women, the reality of the women's lives in poverty, their struggles with drug use and its relation to prostitution, and the processes of social abjection they endure daily (Tyler 2013). Their learning was also about practice approach as they reflected on what they considered to be the core elements of making the project successful in its impact on the women as well as an awareness raising process. The impact of the learning both as a positive process and as an emotional struggle is evident.

This is community development as reflective, learning practice and R's openness about her learning triggers responses from N about hers. N was also highly reflective of her own learning process, looking back on it and considering how it might change as she moves forwards:

R - But I think the women were educating me much as I was there to facilitate photography, you know? Especially E when I was in her house, she really would say to me: 'this is what happens, this is what I do, this is how I do it, this is why I do it'. She said to me one day when I went in, she was hiding her joint tray, I was saying: 'you don't need to hide that from me'. She was putting it away and it had other sort of drug paraphernalia on it and we were talking. Can I talk about heroin?

N – Mhmn.

R - And she was talking about her heroin use and I was gobsmacked to even be aware that she would actually be using heroin in the morning, it was just, I was like, what? Because she seemed really kind of straight to me. And so, I said 'well why do you use it?' And she said:

'because well 1) I can't do anything with these men unless I use heroin and number 2) I'm really, really cheeky and heroin keeps me quiet and if I didn't use heroin, I'd get a punch in the pus'.

J – Oh jeez!

R - And at that point that's what I was learning. I was like: 'what?!' So, there's woman that judge other women for having a heroin habit and you know, in prostitution.

N – Yep.

R - But they have no idea the reason why the heroin and the prostitution go hand in hand even right down to: 'it keeps your mouth shut so you don't get a punch in the pus'…

N – Yep.

R – Actually, I was with [support worker] so I think I just went: 'What?!' you know?

N – Yeah.

R – That was a huge learning lesson for me, a huge education in terms of what these women have to do.

N – I think, I've said at presentations about it, you said you thought you were worldly wise and then this came along and has blown that out. I mean for me who has been involved in sexual health all my life…for me actually hearing it directly from these women was just mind-blowing. Because it no longer was just research or a statistic, but because they were open and honest. You know you hear that women are more likely to be murdered but whenever women were sitting in front of you very calmly describing attempted murders.

J - Oh my goodness.

N - At times it almost felt for me like an out of body [experience] because it was that sense of 'Jeeesus Christ, this is what you're hearing, and this is the reality'. And even although I know all of this, there's something very, very different about being exposed to it.

R - I kept thinking like in a Tarantino movie, you know how horrific they can be I was thinking there's not even a Tarantino movie that has got the script of some of these women's lives. You know like the most unbelievable, disturbing films that you have ever seen, dinnae cut it even with what these women were saying to you. You know because this is now, this is real. That is like a glorification of these women's reality, you know.

The participants' words on the levels of violence the women detail speak for themselves, unfortunately. In many ways they illustrate Farley's (2004) contention that women in prostitution experience harm as an ordinary and enduring aspect of their lives. A sad indictment indeed as the participants also illustrate Thompson's (2007:71) words on gender inequalities:

> We should not underestimate how deeply ingrained disempowering gender inequalities are and how well 'camouflaged' they can be by so-called 'common sense' assumptions.

The violence the women experience is hidden in plain sight, it is normalised, and they become subjected to processes of what Thompson goes on to describe as invisibilisation (2007). The levels of violence are shocking to hear, they are enduring, and the participants are clearly impacted by the stories. The optimism that community development practice brings is a welcome reprieve amongst the weight of violence and oppression that shocks, hurts and diminishes.

N – And I think because we turned it to the women: 'this is your project, this is your work, this is what you're doing, this is for you', the whole time, I think that gave the women the freedom to open up a bit more coz they, I wouldn't say they trusted us completely at the start and actually I think they didn't trust us.

R - Yeah.

N - But that gave them a sense of freedom because they could, if they walked out that door that could be the last of it, you'd never see them again. And I can remember one of the days coming up here to do interviews and I missed about three trains coz I just walked around…oh just dandered about parts of [city] coz I thought 'I just can't get on that frickin train, I can't get on the train yet'. Because d'you know, the women would be incredibly honest with us. But for me I had to be honest with myself about what it was doing to me and R. And I mean after, if we spent time with the women, the two of us would sit and very often there would be tears…that was incredibly important to have that degree of honesty between ourselves.

R - Yeah.

N - That actually, yes this was affecting us and no this was not easy. This was not an easy project and that if we couldn't talk to each other about what it was doing and have a good old greet where was our valve, d'you know what I mean? And I did, and I still do, feel a degree of responsibility towards R…because I've seen your consciousness level just change... we had the joke about your feminist manifesto.

R - Yeah, yeah, no, my feminist mandate.

N - Feminist mandate that's it, you know.

R - I'm not allowed to talk about it to anybody, people just go 'oh no, here she goes again, she's basically ranting'.

N - Do you know there was a sense of responsibility…

J - Because of the change, the change in you?

N -Yeah.

R - I just felt like I had to say, not just to every single person, but you know people just started speaking and I was: 'Oh whoa, whoa, no! You have No Idea!' and then it would start,

especially boys, they would be like, oh they can't even listen to it, they would just disagree with me and say: 'You are lying, it's not true'.

N - What's that feel like for you for somebody to say: 'that's not true'? Coz it mirrors what the women get.

R - ….I almost got to the point when I knew so much…but I knew I was right, I had to stop, I'd just take a deep breath and go 'I'm not even going any further with you, coz you're an idiot'.

N - But there is something about that huge change do you know what I mean and now you've had all of this, been exposed to all of this.

R - Yeah. It gets to the point as well though if we're really in deep in the workshops or working together I can't even look at men walking down the road…

N - And I can remember when I started this job thinking 'I'm worldly wise, I've worked in sexual health for years, Jesus I'm a sex educator, I'm so cool with everything'. And actually, going: 'Well, I'm not frickin' cool with everything'. So, I knew what I'd been through and my poor partner, at night I'd be like 'come here you, wait til I tell you this and I'd just be like blah blah blah blah'… But I had a sounding board and I was going 'where's R's sounding board?' Where's your sounding board?

R - Anybody who would listen.

N - Yeah.

The learning that R describes she gains about women's experiences of violence, drug use and prostitution and their lives living in poverty mirror the impact of the project itself as an awareness raising and education process. The book, the exhibition and the ensuing dialogue with service providers, politicians, educators and even 'punters' are a parallel learning process. The photographs and stories are shocking, they rattle, they are upsetting,

and the exhibition has high impact. The learning creates anger, the injustice fuels fury and that in turn is a catalyst for continued impact, a tool for social change (Dominelli1990).

The power of dialogue in the learning process is visible. An engagement with dialogue creates possibilities for recognising the unacceptability of violence against women alongside a recognition of 'capacities for survival' (Batsleer 2013:143). In this way the participants are learning about the woman's experiences whilst in dialogue with them. At that point they are both the educator and the educated. Their conversations are the everyday necessity of community development process, apparently ordinary with no sense of a need for the community worker to step in with advice and expertise, however warmly given, on the downside of taking heroin; but a listening, an understanding and an acknowledgement of the realities of the women's lives. The action is not advice that pathologises, individualises and disperses, it is a mutual offering of messages that educate each other and more broadly.

Lorde (2019:33) advises that 'it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken'. The participants work with the women to break silences together. It would be possible for the participants to stop and hold the silences in the moments when the women leave and they support each other, in tears, but they do not. Community development process demands more, it demands a breaking of the silences of oppression together and a speaking outward for impact and political and social change. This is important and highly skilled, ethical work. Community development does not write people off because they are using drugs, they do not become 'a single story' (Adichie 2009), labelled a drug user with the worker as the saviour service provider. A different relationship is built, based on mutuality, respect, with acknowledgement of the oppressive power of silences and of so-called common sense. There is empathy, listening and working together to tell the story, a striving for change, hope and a relationship towards development.

This is community development as a multi-layered learning process. It is symbolic and illustrates some of the complex layers of learning that the participants' work, alongside the women, facilitates. As the participants develop their levels of critical consciousness, so do the women develop their levels of critical awareness, and people generally are impacted by their photographs and stories as they read the blog and visit the exhibitions. The feminist community development 'commitment to raising public consciousness' is consequently at play (Dominelli 1990:104). Directly expressed by Seal (2014:21), 'knowledge creation is something we can, and should, all engage in' and the women in their representations of their stories are undoubtedly generating knowledge.

N – …we had a blog running because we wanted to share what we were doing, the learning and what was going on…so it wasn't just a project launched with a nice wee exhibition. We wanted to find ways to keep people involved…an openness I think to what was going on meant that other people could come in on it. And it wasn't just the final product it was the full [process]: 'what are we learning what are we doing?'.

R – Yeah, yeah.

N - …we tried to be really open and honest and probably not that professional, some people will probably think not that professional…it was about what we were feeling, what our connection was, about relationships, what the relationships were with the women, with workers…I mean all of that… this sense of 'we welcome you in on the journey with us and with the women…' [rather than] very closed: 'I'll tell people when it's done in case we make a mistake on the way through'...

R – And because the whole realm of prostitution is so far removed from what anybody really knows what's going on, it brought it really close to people really quickly. People had a real quick insight into what it was like. It changed perceptions so quickly. People would go: 'Oh

my God N I didn't realise or know that' [and] 'R I didn't realise this, you know I thought it was their choice, everybody was happy doing it and it was [like the film] Pretty Woman'.

N – And if you think about community development approaches and you know, identifying needs and looking at how we support people, do we meet those needs? I mean it did have a huge impact on the women. And I think it would be easy to hold certain women up as the poster girls of this project which is grossly unfair, either on them coz then they are carrying a heavy weight, but also in that all of the women made steps, and their own steps in their own way. And this is going to sound unprofessional but there would be times when I'd be going: 'Really? It's doing this for people? And people are getting this much benefit out of it, really?' And it kind of struck you how vulnerable the women are then. [One of the women] K would send an email and go 'I'm feeling like this about it' and you go 'it doesn't take that much, really?'.

J – Yeah.

N - So if you are thinking about a project that has benefit for people. Was it [that] the women were listened to? But part of me is going if you summed up what the story was, we just gave the women the chance to tell their stories or that's what the project was. We gave the women the chance to tell their stories, and for other people to listen to them, that's what it is. It's not that much, do you know, it really is not that much. But to these women it's that sense of how huge that was.

The power of the chance to tell your story, be listened to and for it to be held up as important enough to be made into an exhibition and a book that will educate people. The power of the chance to tell your story and the catalyst that can be. This is community development process as voice, making the invisible visible, bringing realities to the fore with hope for impact and change. It is the chance to tell a story, but in a social context and grounded in respectful 'personal is political' process (Millet 1969).

Fairey (2017:624) points to the use of participatory photography as ‘diverse, open-ended and unpredictable’ practice. Similarly, this dialogue reveals practice that is unpredictable in many ways and the unpredictability is both important to its success, and simultaneously potentially problematic in a context driven by the neoliberal fervour for outcome-led practice. When the impact on the women is so surprisingly large because their lives are so significantly small, a market-led measurement of that feels unethical.

The learning that community development process inspires is presented as multi-faceted. There are deliberate learning opportunities created through the blog for the wider public, individual, and collective learning opportunities for the women, and also constant learning for the participants. Reminiscent of Seals’ (2014) call to knowledge creation being for everyone, the participants and the women are indeed extending a wide learning opportunity to all.

N – [So], R, you’d hung the exhibition and then we had the first public kind of screening and I remember hearing you that day talking to other people, and that night talking to other people, about the photographs and going: ‘I think you’ve got it’. Do you know what I mean?

R – Coz I knew what was going on by then, (laughter) it’s true!

N – Yeah but that was part of your learning and development. Do you know what I mean? But it is, it was, part of your learning and development in the project.

R –Yeah, I’m not even embarrassed by that.

N - No!

R - I just think it’s part of the story as well, that I had no idea what was going on.

N – Yeah.

J – But I wonder if that's been a really important part of it, that yes you are learning but because you were there with your heart with the women, then it was their stories, it wasn't about any of the other goals, it was fundamentally about the women and their stories and their pictures?

R - Yeah, mhmn, mhmn.

N – And doing the best for the women.

R – And two people doing exactly what they had to do. I mean my job wasn't really to take it on, but now it's changed, I'm far more aware of what's going on now. But any normal people would have hung [the exhibition] up here first but our on the job training was in Holyrood!

N –Yeah.

R - That's how ridiculous it was. I was just like 'aahh'. But the first time you'd ever put this out to the public was not to a group of fifty people in here who had no idea, it was to the government! That, in itself, is unbelievable! …so, by the time I'd had my training in Holyrood I had it going on, I was like: 'Ask me anything guys, I know what I'm doing!'

N – But I think that's it, because my role in Holyrood was to start it off, but then you picked it up and ran with it and turned it into your own and found your own voice within it, do you know what I mean? Your own sharing of what things meant and the women and what you knew of the women, do you know what I mean? It wasn't like we had a script that you must stand and read.

R – No.

N - Coz then it's not real and it becomes false and it becomes the script that must be adhered to. Whereas you need to immerse yourself in it, in a way, in order to do the justice to it. Um, and if I hadn't of trusted R, then I would have handed her a script.

R - Yes.

N - And said: 'R just read this' you know? But I trusted her implicitly and there was a few things we talked about, but I trusted her.

R - I would double check things out: 'Have I got the gist of that right? Did that happen?' [and N would say:] 'yes it did'.

N – But if we weren't comfortable with each other then you wouldn't have been able to, I wouldn't have trusted you and you wouldn't have been able to go: 'jeez was that alright? Did I say that alright? Is that okay?'

R – I felt like I could positively make mistakes with N or question even like…'I'm not sure if I've done that right, is that right?' You know, I think that was really important to the working.

Again, a commitment to the values as defined by Ledwith (2016:7) 'trust, dignity, respect, equality, reciprocity, mutuality' is evident in the relationship between the participants as well as in their approach to their engagement with the women and the learning process. The learning extends to the organisations in the network as the impact of the project on the women and those who see the exhibition becomes clear.

Reflections on the community development process used in the project highlight other limited, ameliorative practice and provides some insight into the challenges that come from neoliberalism.

N – … [we] talk of CLD and community based work [but] I think for the [organisations] they are now funded so tightly and it is literally: 'now you are funded for four hours a week to do direct face to face support work which is dealing with this', and there's not the scope within [it].

R – It's not creative, there isn't the time to be creative. You've got to write it down, type it up.

N – Yeah, I think some of the services do do really great work but there's not the time given and there's not the funding given and so much now is, it sounds terrible, it's like single outcome agreements and it's [like] service level agreements.

R – It's so bureaucratic, isn't it?

N - It's all of this because that's what services have to do to get money…I know services that would like to do more of it [community development] but the scope is so tight that there isn't the freedom to do all of this and that. You know I'm thinking about [example of an organisation] there is things around that creativity, but they've had to work long and hard to get an extra two grand to run that programme. It's just not part and parcel of what people do. And I think for staff learning and development so much now is let's just get staff onto an online eLearning course. People aren't released for training; they don't sit in a room amongst other staff and workers. Remember the luxury of when we used to have a full day with people and you could take them through a journey of learning, attitudes…now staff are released for two hours and it's a lunch time session or twilight sessions.

R - But even for sitting there for those two hours, it's like 'I've got loads to do I can't be here'. So, there's not even space for staff to go through a journey of development because now that's a luxury or you know 'we'll give you two hours'…

N - …I think back to community work in the 90s and a lot of it was our own reflection, our own learning and I know that's core and part and parcel of what you should do. But in many services now that's considered a luxury because we have got funding for you to do four hours face to face work with somebody, and another funding pot has given two hours, so it has become so much more focussed on the crisis…and I don't want to be negative as I know there is staff who do all the development work but it's not the core business any more.

R – Yes.

N - And I think you know if you hear from the women, I'm thinking of W she doesn't have, she's not engaged to the same level with support work or a support worker. But she's tried to

tell her story time and time and time again and nobody wanted to know or what they said is 'we'll come to that another time or we're just dealing with the addiction issue…' and how V said earlier the two go hand in hand [but] whenever W was at addiction services it was 'we just deal with addiction and see that prostitution, that's somebody else's'.

J – Yeah.

N - So I talked at the start about violence against women, about making the connection to across different forms, and you're not going to deal with that. I think we're moving further back into segregated pieces of work…women are in a silo of our service…I think we're losing that sense of people need huge amount of connections and different people all coming together, do you know what I mean? … Also, where are the exciting pieces of work (sounds terrible) where's the exciting pieces of work for people now because their heads are down? …I think [this project] sparked something for people.

R – Yeah, I think it sparked something for a lot of people and [name of senior NHS person] was overwhelmed by the exhibition and everything that's gone on...needs to be used in more community engagement projects the story telling of it, the bringing everyone together, you know…

N – I know some managers had a discussion to say: 'right what are we learning from this?' actually. And we have come up with ideas for the future, you know…

The impact of neoliberal-led funding focussed on time limited support is highlighted as problematic and a limitation to the creativity and time that community development requires. As Minnite and Fox Piven (2016) highlight, neoliberalism results in heightened market-led competition that has direct impacts on public service funding. With services competing against each other for limited funding the outcome based, minimal contact, support becomes funded preferentially over longer-term development, and a narrow compartmentalisation of people's lives results. The women become single stories (Adichie 2009) of drug addiction in

one service and prostitution in another service, their agency depleted, their identities defined by service provision. More than that, however, the ideological grounding becomes one of need, with measures of how much in need of support the women are, in order for support time to be allocated. Fraser's (2020) thoughts on this are instructive as she points to processes of economizing creating depoliticization and narrow needs analyses. The impact, she explains is that 'members of subordinated groups commonly internalise need interpretations that work to their own disadvantage' (2020:84).

The stark contrast between that image, of timed needs support packages and the practice revealed in this dialogue in which the women's voices lead, their stories have centre stage in a process that is mutually developed, as the participants and women learn together in a complex journey, is revealing. The shared learning is multi-dimensional, developmental, personal, and political and it acts as an ongoing catalyst for change.

Invest in the potential for change

The participants never lose sight of the potential for positive change for, and with, the women. This is not about naïve hope, rather it aligns with Freire's (2016:23) thoughts on optimistic practice:

> critical optimism, one that may engage us in the struggle toward knowing, knowing on a par with our times and at the service of the exploited…[to] recognize reality …[and] the obstacles.

Their hope for change is ultimately about hope for better lives for the women and this involves a recognition that it requires change more broadly in society, particularly in terms of

legislation around prostitution, greater awareness of the impact of it on women, a move away from social subjection and a constant striving for gender equalities. According to Ledwith (2016:42), community development as transformative practice 'begins in dialogue in a community group; from there it moves into local action, but it never stops at the boundary of community'. This, she suggests, is necessary in order to influence change in terms of structural inequalities. The participants acutely recognise this, know there is a need for the awakening of service providers, politicians, academics and the wider public, and they strive to share their awareness of gender inequalities, framing the women's experiences within a feminist lens throughout.

The potential for change represented by this dialogue is very much grounded in the awareness raising potential of the women's stories and photos. The photo exhibition and book were designed as a platform for the women's images, their voices, and their stories. The impact of this can be seen in different ways and is at once personal and political. The decision to exhibit at Holyrood demonstrates a desire for the women's stories to be heard beyond community and by politicians and decision makers in order to trigger their learning towards action.

N – And do you remember when [we] came into Holyrood, oh Jesus Christ that was an intense few days, because we deliberately wanted to, I deliberately wanted to launch in Holyrood. What are you laughing at?

R – You! Coz she was like: 'there's so and so and…' naming tory party names, and: 'Hi there…!'

N – And then they'd come over and give the women their time! I mean it was all a strategy, we had sent flyers round all the MSPs, so they knew this thing was coming, but anybody who walked past we said: 'hello!'

R – Shouted on them!

N - We chatted to them. But to me that sums up the project because it was about being engaging and approachable and open.

R –…yeah and they said they were used to people being in that space…but this was a full-blown exhibition.

N – Yeah, something very different.

R – For them, yeah, and really engaging.

N – So I mean for us, that was a really emotional week. And I think for me even though we had this idea, whenever it was actually a reality it was as mind-blowing for us as it was for the women…and you think back to how intense that week was, because we had to do the best for the women, they weren't there, so our job was to do the absolute best for those women, do you know what I mean, by proxy.

J – Yes.

N - So, if we weren't engaged and talking with people, then they were never going to engage with the women. So, it was really, intense, it was bloody exhausting! You never sat down. I didn't eat for four days… But equally, I will say that I had thought through how I would introduce it to people, and how you might turn of phrase it and all that. But I didn't know what it was going to be like until we physically had people in front of us and had to do it. So, it was very much on the feet, on the hoof, do you know? And actually, I didn't expect that people would want to know so much about the women. I actually had the idea that they would just look at the photographs without that sense of who are the women behind all of this. And I think that was part of the intensity. That week was that realisation that people are genuinely interested in who done this, who took this [photo].

Driven by her feminist commitment to the ‘personal is political’ (Millet 1969), N had a vision from the outset of taking the women’s stories to politicians so they could learn from them. By exhibiting at the Scottish Parliament with the strategy of engaging as many Members of the Scottish Parliament in dialogue as possible, the participants gave the women’s lives political visibility.

The actions at the parliament represent key aspects of community development process. Chatting, engaging, being approachable and open are all used to describe them, but also grounded in elegant challenging (Thompson 2007). N goes on to suggest that certain surprise questions that came their way meant they were operating ‘on the hoof’. However, it is important to contextualise this because it belies her depth of engagement with the women. It was all grounded in her openness to learning their lived realities, her strong ideological perspective grounded in feminism and an understanding of structural inequalities and oppression, and the robust process of capturing and representing the women’s perspectives. She knew the details of the women’s stories, their struggles, their social abjection and their humour, energy, and desire for change. She could therefore speak it from the heart, grounded in political motivation. Essentially, this is an example of the power of dialogue, and its exciting unpredictability, being used to engage with politicians. Freire’s (2016:54) comments are instructive:

> Dialogism presupposes maturity, a spirit of adventure, confidence in questioning, and seriousness in providing answers.

This was at play because of a sophisticated ability to understand and articulate the complexities of the women’s lives within a ‘personal is political’ (Millet 1969) framework. This also meant they could keep the women alive in the exhibition, they were not invisible objects

of social abjection. The interest in the women behind the photographs and narratives is testament to their respectful, loving engagement.

Conscious that they were representing the women in that space, they are clear they were there to share their stories and invite people to read the book and look at the photos. Ultimately, this was about encouraging the politicians to give the women their time and attention. This is transformative action, a pushing back at boundaries of oppression, a naming of injustices, voiced by the women's stories and photographs.

R – …it was always about the women from the start.

N – And there would be times when you would be biting your tongue…comments that people made… Like a [certain politician], they have a very clear stated policy position, a party-political position… [and a] clearly stated personal opinion about it. And he would not come near us all week… [because his perspective is] that this is a form of empowerment.

R – It's bizarre with [that political party] you'd think they were a bit more left wing.

N – Well they…like the 'Edinburgh Approach'… what interests me…is that you can criticise global industries, you criticise capitalism…

R – That's what I'm talking about.

N – You criticise all of that, but round the sex industry you can't apply the same measures…

R – Capitalising women.

N – Women are the commodity, but like he avoided us all week, absolutely avoided us.

R – She was like: 'Get him over here now!'

N – Well he was one of the ones I wanted to [speak to]…And I'd been following his Twitter feed to see if he mentioned [the exhibition] and he hadn't…I noticed him having jokes with sex workers just as his normal run of the mill Twitter feed…seeing the lengths that man went

to avoid these women's stories, I was getting angry… He would walk past the exhibition and I would step out and be like 'Hi [name]' and he would just blank me. And so, he became my mission, to get [him] to see the women's photographs.

R – Yes.

N - A friend of mine had come in who knew him and she happened to be standing there as he walked past. And she went and spoke to him and then brought him over, so he had no option. And honestly, he couldn't even look at the women's photographs and all he kept saying was: 'Yeah but there are women who find this fine.' And I said 'I know that, and you know that…and I know some of those women have a very public forum. And you give them a very public forum. All I'm asking is can you give these women five minutes [so] can we have some parity here? Just give these women five minutes'.

J – Yes.

N - I wanted to be saying [much more] to him. But no, I can't get into that discussion here because I see then that this is disingenuous coz this is the women's time, this is their time, this is their time. That kind of analysis and debate and discussion may go on in other forums but not during this exhibition, not during it. And that I'm not going to put words in these women's mouths.

There is no sense of this being an easy process, it is an intensely challenging balance. They spent a week at Holyrood with the exhibition, striving to raise awareness and to educate. From realising some people were profoundly affected by the women's photographs and stories and wanted to know more about them, they simultaneously faced politicians who subscribe to the view of prostitution as empowering work, anathema to the participants' perspectives. The power of informal education as conversations with a purpose (Jeffs and Smith 2005) is represented as dynamic, exhausting, emotional, hopeful, and grounded in transformative political intent.

There is something at once revealing but also moving about N's reflections on the time at Holyrood. They walked a fine line using dialogue to influence politicians to learn about the women's lived experiences. There is a sense of her energy and engagement that is revealing of the complexities of their role. The desire to impact for positive social changes in line with Dominelli's (2006) feminist community development perspectives is palpable. However, hooks' (2000) 'love ethic' reigns supreme in the moment when the women's work is protected from politicians' disrespect. The women's stories and photos provided a message, they illuminated their perspectives, and the participant's conviction is clearly to the women's version of events. In this moment, hooks' words about voice come alive and are worth revisiting:

> Often this speech about the 'other' annihilates, erases. No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the coloniser, the speaking subject and you are now at the centre of my talk (hooks, 1989: 22).

hooks' words speak to this project on so many levels and the need to avoid debating with the politician in the presence of the women's' work, representing their lived experiences, is profoundly respectful. More so since there is clearly an underlying political agenda.

J – But you had a political agenda? Would that be fair to say?

N – I do, my organisation has a clear political agenda.

R – But that wasn't what you were shouting about. You were manoeuvring your political agenda without any word of politics within it.

J – Without imposing it?

N – No.

R – And that's what was so unbelievable about it, a political swing without you even mentioning once, even in Holyrood.

N – No, in Holyrood I never, and I said 'these women don't have a political agenda. All we are asking you to do is to give these women time and to listen to their stories and you decide then at the end of it'.

R – That's it, that's all you ever said to them, you gave them the information and that was it.

N – But I wouldn't ever have stood and said and 'we would like this legislation and we would…' No.

R – No, none of that.

N – Because there's a time and a place for that and this is the women's time…

J – So it's not fair to say you had a political agenda?

N – No I think it is fair, because my political agenda is [that] this is inequality, and this should not be happening.

The framing of the women's experiences of prostitution as inequalities is a consistent thread throughout the dialogue, representing the participants' practice as deeply grounded in a broader structural analysis. Their understanding that women in prostitution collectively are impacted by injustice influences their approach and their drive for transformation. The aim is for the women's work to have impact, to encourage a reimagining of the taken for granted aspects of their lives and for their lived experiences to influence decision makers. In effect, this is for the hidden injuries of the women's lives to be revealed. The dialogue skirts over a

political swing, suggesting successful political impact, but that is not the main focus here, the women are.

The exhibition of photographs and narratives was also presented in different cities across Scotland and this time it was attended by the women. Their identities remained protected, either by mingling in amongst the crowd of visitors or by wearing faceless masks along with others. Their presence with their work meant they had a role as educators with transformative potential.

N – …see presenting in [city] I could see K and I could see A and being so conscious of them there and that dynamic changed for me. You know coz they're there and [I was] wanting to do them so proud.

R – Yeah.

N - …and wanting, yeah, that they would be proud. Do you know, I wanted them to be proud. But also thinking 'what is this like for them? What must this feel like for them?' You know conscious of it. K the first time I met her she was like more layers of concrete onion. And just looking at her she was just like, had big red eyes. I was thinking I can see her, but I can't make eye contact with her certain times in this.

R – Yes.

N - You know but afterwards I said to her 'how are you?' She said: 'I don't know, I feel overwhelmed, I'm buzzing…'. You know so for her it was a huge night. She said, 'I'll never forget that night in my life.'… [It was] the first time she's ever been to anything like that. Now, actually she's coming to [City outside Scotland] with me and she's going to speak at an event…she really wants to do this… so we have agreed social media lock down, you know, we have agreed all these things…But for her she went 'I want to do this now, I want to do it'.

R – It's out of Scotland as well.

N – … and for me that has a huge learning around it. And also I think Jean you know if you think about what community development and the role of community development is, it is about empowering people and that's a word I hate the concept of empowerment because actually you are not giving anybody power you're not giving away any real power…I think it is more about politicising people. And K is a prime example of somebody who is now very angry, very angry with the systems, very angry, you know she sent me an email she'd recently seen something on TV and she was just livid about how they were talking about prostitution as a form of work and she was like: 'Jesus!', you know. So, her whole political awakening is happening, a bit like you went through at the start of the project (to R). She's going through that now. But we have never once said to these women 'you have been exploited'.

Critical consciousness, political awakening, not empowerment. N touches again on one of the central premises of community development with 'empowerment', and her thoughts on it are important. There remains much focus on 'empowerment' in community development discourse, with some careless use of it as a term. Hoggett *et al* (2009:92) are instructive:

> the welfare citizen becomes an object of empowerment strategies. Empowerment, like community, becomes construed as something poor people lack, a fundamentally patronising model of development.

Here Hoggett *et al* usefully highlight inadvertent contradictions in a practice that espouses values of mutuality, respect, and self-determination. The notion of becoming politicised has a very different essence. Emejulu and Bronstein (2011:286) point to one of the strengths of

feminist community development as facilitating ‘ordinary’ women to engage with the political. Taking this further, Jha (2016:79) contends there is:

> arguably, a political subject within every oppressed woman as she has a keen sense of the deprivation and denial she is going through and the process of devising strategies to deal with everyday violence has taught her unique skills to negotiate the spaces to fight back and assert herself.

Tyler’s (2013) thoughts resonate here as we see the power of ‘revolting subjects’. It also takes us closer to Freire’s notion of conscientisation and the need for this kind of practice that ‘underscores the importance of the social, the economic, and the political’ (2016:13). Revisiting Rancière (2001) assertion that everyone can indeed learn, everyone can also become politized, and indeed may be already. This is important to the ideological underpinnings of community development, namely having attitudes that politicise rather than empower have a different essence that is of import. To further elucidate, this also draws on Gramsci’s (1975) concept of organic intellectuals and community development needs to hold onto that combined premise.

In this way the investment in the potential for change is not focussed on the women as problematic people who need to change, it is grounded in the understanding that their lives are unduly influenced by wider social influences. As Dominelli (2006:107) contends:

> Redefining social problems from a feminist perspective is crucial to challenging prevailing definitions of issues and developing feminist consciousness.

The focus on the women's lives and perspectives is framed by a feminist analysis of subjugation. Their personal situations are political, their stories are at once painful and individual but also shared and political. This dynamic is revealing of practice with ideological foundations in equity and a will to engage politically and educationally to 'steer society in the interests of justice' (Fraser 2020:306). There is a clear investment in the potential for change but with a careful grounding in a love ethic and not to misuse the women in that process.

N - Now I got really quite angry with someone recently at [name of place] event because I heard her talking to someone and saying: 'So what these women want is the Nordic model.' And I took her aside and said: 'they didn't say that, they didn't say that…you can say it in other contexts about what you think…but we're not putting that onto these women'. Um and I think that's maybe why some people were a bit disappointed because they felt that I didn't push the political analysis enough. My view is that will come...I think they wanted this project to come up with the sound bites where I would capture the women saying: 'we need the Nordic Model in Scotland'…that's an entirely different project. It's not to say that that might not happen in the future but that's not what this project is…

R – But your political agenda was never the forefront…it was always about the women from the start…

N - … what they did say is 'no I don't want it fully legalised Jesus Christ you get removing the pimping laws this is what's going to happen, who's suggesting that, this is not us'…that is their opinion but then I can't go 'they support the Nordic model' coz they didn't say that.

J – No, no.

N – So d'you know I'm very clear on that, the women have their opinions and it's their opinions based on their realities.

The political process and drive to influence towards positive social change is mitigated by the respect for the women. Here the dialogue reveals insights into some of the challenges of pursuing community development process. For N, it is clear that her role is to be led by the women and not by her interpretation of them. This way the exhibition provides a catalyst for discussion and action that could potentially influence policy, but that had to be done with respect. hooks' (1989) challenge to neither speak for nor reinterpret offers a timely reminder. The challenge here is to stay with the women and their stories and lived experiences and not use them to voice what you want heard. N is profoundly aware of the danger of 'mis-stepping' (Urie *et al* 2019:94) and in this way the lesson is that the personal and political cannot be separated, they feed each other. The desire and push for transformation and political change cannot railroad the women and adapt their voice for political gain. This is a fine line to tread.

Messages from the dialogue

The overwhelming message from this dialogue is one of deep caring and respect for the women, combined with a feminist drive for societal change. Framing prostitution as violence against women, the participants are unrelenting in their perspective that it is grounded in gender inequalities, the subjection of women and patriarchal domination. In this context, much as Lorde (1984) suggests that we must strive for a society that rejoices in diversity as an enriching equal experience, the participants introduce us to community development practice that reveals women's hidden stories with them and invites a respectful, loving, courageous, learning engagement with them.

The moving acknowledgement of the lack of value the women have experienced throughout their lives goes some way to illustrating the drive to work with them to produce something beautiful and true. This illustrates the community development commitment to equity at a

basic level, in that just because the women were in dire social circumstances didn't mean that a making-do would ever suffice. On the contrary' this is about there being 'no deserving or undeserving in society' and it sits in direct opposition to perspectives such as the notion of the 'underclass' or the 'undeserving poor' (Murray 1986). The participants and women engage in a process of challenging the 'accepted norm' that women in prostitution are 'social abjects' (Tyler 2013) and create an impactful exhibition of their work.

There is much to learn from the women's lived realities and not least the levels of violence they suffer, and the community development process reveals this as personal and political. Farley (2004:1093) contends that 'in prostitution there is no avoiding sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, rape, and acts that are the equivalent of torture'. This is unfortunately reflected in the stories the participants hear from the women about their daily lives and there is undoubted painful impact on them as they listen and learn. Similarly through interviewing around fifty women involved in prostitution, Nixon, Tutty, Downe, Gorkoff and Ursel (2002:1023) found that the women spoke of 'high rates of violence perpetrated against them' and, somewhat concerning, that the women 'perceived the extreme violence as normal or expected' (2002:1024). Again, this is reflected in the women's telling of their lives and community development allows for a revealing of this 'accepted norm' as unacceptable.

This is noticeable in the impact the women's stories have on the participants but also in the wider impact their photographs and narratives have on other people who see them. Perhaps more important is the impact the revealing of their stories has on the women themselves, as some become politicised, angry, aware of their experiences as injustice, appreciative of their own photography, moved and inspired by their witnessing of its impact on others, and then feel how it is to be valued, have agency and educate. The drive of the participants in the dialogue to engage in a community development process with the women that facilitates this

process is illustrative of Emejulu and Bronstein's (2011:286) words on feminist community development as:

> Supporting ordinary women to engage with political and policy processes and question the common-sense assumptions that shape their experiences is what is both distinctive and vital about community development on gender.

Whilst I reflect that the women involved in this project are far from 'ordinary', their extraordinary stories and their extraordinary drive to tell them potentially have indeed influenced policy, other people's attitudes and their own. Their book, their stories and their photos challenge the everyday assumptions on their lives and make the invisible visible in ways that impact emotionally on a personal level but also politically at a structural level. Further, much as Jha (2016: 79) highlights the experiences of Dalit women's assertiveness, perhaps for these women 'the outcomes of their mobilisations are more transformative than ever could be anticipated by either the state or dominant social groups'.

Central to these experiences is a feminist inspired love ethic (hooks 2000). This is about developing an empathic understanding of women's lives, it is at times angry practice, but always driven by a desire to work together to make a real difference to the women's lives based on a deep caring for their experiences and just how limited their opportunities have been to date. Importantly, perceiving that as injustice that needs righted. Part of this is however remaining true to the women's expressed perspectives and not changing or adapting that for political gain.

Similarly, the relationship between the two participants is of crucial importance and they both consider that to be a fundamental part of the community development process. The strong

sense of caring for each other is evident throughout, it is a reciprocal caring. They both know the challenges of knowing.

Dominelli's (2011:187) further contention that feminist community work is driven by the principle of 'taking action to end inegalitarian social relations' concisely illustrates much of this dialogue, with her words 'social change is the ultimate aim of feminist social action' pervasive throughout. However, this is not a simple task and both participants talk about the difficult experiences, almost shock, of hearing about the women's lives, alongside the strong feelings of empathy and of injustice they experience. The challenge of engaging with community development practice that strives to make the invisible visible, to voice injustice and to challenge for positive social change comes at a cost to self that has to be both managed and recognised. Community development can be arduous practice.

A mutual learning process is apparent throughout this dialogue and that manifests on many different levels. It is apparent that processes of conscientisation are at play in many. Some of the women become politicised and plan to speak at events engaged in learning that realigns personal challenges as public issues. There is stark learning that comes with seeing your photographs and stories displayed together as an educative exhibition attended by politicians, educators, academics, police, and service providers. The learning that comes through engagement, perhaps the power of informal learning, is equally evident as hooks (1989:24) explains:

> in small groups individuals do not need to be equally literate, or literate at all, because the information is primarily shared through conversation. Through dialogue which is necessarily a liberatory expression.

The power of dialogue as a catalyst for learning is evident throughout and for none more so that participant R. Her honest reflections on her learning journey are revealing of the power of community development for critical awakening. The importance of her articulation of her respectful learning process throughout ought not to be underestimated and it influences N in her reflections. They both learned as part of this process and being open to mutual learning is a revealing characteristic of community development practice. Their call for more community development approaches to be funded is also reflective of their learning processes. They notice the challenges to support oriented practice, the desire for more space for creativity and the limitations that funding-led approaches bring.

The women being in control of their stories, their expression, the photographs they took and chose to include in the exhibition, is central to everything. Their thinking and their actions influence throughout as the participants quickly realise the process needs to be flexible, iterative and the script needs to be written together, in mutual process. Mutuality means everyone has something to offer in this process and this is essential to avoid the misguided misappropriation of feminist action and thinking by a privileged few (Fraser 2020). The participants were not the only experts in this process and that is profoundly important, the women were too. As Adichie (2014:48) espouses feminism is for all.

The process of this feminist inspired community development is powerful, and it continues, the dialogue revealing just a snapshot of it. Long may it continue, there is much to be done, as Fraser espouses ‘this is a moment in which feminists should think big’ (2020:307).

CHAPTER 4: Revealing Insights

Introduction

This final chapter presents a synthesis of the learning from the dialogues. Essentially the messages from each dialogue stand alone and whilst this section represents a cross-analysis of the dialogues, importantly it does not replace nor dilute the lessons presented from each dyad. Due attention needs to be paid both to the analysis of the individual dialogues in their representations of community development practice as well as the joint analysis. In this way the learning, and the contribution to knowledge, is multi-layered.

This chapter also presents my conclusions about the impact of the methodological approach that was applied, particularly the introduction of dyadic dialogical interviewing as a research method. I conclude it was crucial in revealing and presenting the practitioners' practice intentions and ideological underpinnings, but also instrumental in portraying their practice in its depth. Granted, it has constraints and I also reflect on those as I highlight the strengths and limitations of the research process. That said, I present dyadic dialogical interviewing as a community development inspired research method that has a role in the democratisation of research, particularly in challenging for a narrowing of the space between practice and research. There is much to learn from the practitioners that is revealed through the dialogical process, and I highlight the need for their voices to be made more readily visible in literature and in the theorising of community development as a mutual endeavour.

Practice and process for positive social change

In drawing together combined conclusions from the dialogues, community development is revealed as clear, courageous, caring, critical, politically motivated practice that is grounded

in ideological thinking, respect for people's agency, and in mutual striving for transformative social change. Specifically, community development is represented as the practice of working with people in communities on their experiences of living in substandard housing and activating for change; of working alongside people living in urban areas with high levels of deprivation and acting collectively on the complex social ramifications of life in poverty; of building community with young people as transformative counter-culture to marginalisation; and, as working with women involved in prostitution to represent the realities of their lived experiences and to challenge for social, cultural and political awareness of that. It is in the depth of dialogical presentations that the nuances of their impactful practices are revealed. Notably, each dialogue also exposes community development as process since people in communities are represented throughout the dialogues as actively involved in mutual endeavour around different experiences of social inequalities and action for change, both with the community development practitioners and at times without.

The dialogues discover that the power of community development practice is grounded in an analysis of injustice, importantly in the community workers' critiques of social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities and how that underpins their every move. However, this is not delimited to their versions of injustice, rather it is coupled with the hearing of the truths of people's lived experiences in communities and in the mutual speaking out of the social violence they endure hidden in plain sight. This is of fundamental importance, indeed with *people arnae stupid* the prevailing attitude of the participants throughout the dialogues, their practice consistently straddles their own intellectual understandings of the ramifications of systemic injustice whilst being enlivened by their learning from community members' critical understandings of living their lives encircled by those ramifications. This duality is of crucial importance to their practice and consequently, R's (Dialogue 4) feminist mandate is fuelled by her learning that heroin use in prostitution acts as foil for further violence; T (Dialogue 2) muses that women move beyond identities given to them by service provision as they

campaign across the city; U (Dialogue 1) fully recognises her learning from, and reliance on, the ‘well-kent face’; and E (Dialogue 3) realises the unyielding need for the rainbow flag to be hoisted. It is in these mutual sagacious understandings that community development practice is sparked and fuels actions for social change. The recognition of community development as process as well as practice is central to this. It is indeed evident throughout that people in communities engage in community development actions without community workers as well as with them. Such respect for people in communities to engage community development process ought not to be defensively seen as a dilution of community development practice, on the contrary, practice is necessarily and ordinarily fuelled by this. It is in the mutuality that the strength of practice prevails and the community development practitioners’ commitment to that at every level is crucial.

In the dialogues we see theoretically grounded practice revealed. With community development practice portrayed in this way by participants as strong, ideologically founded and politically motivated, such clarity of purpose offers a pointed challenge to the criticisms in the literature of community development as unthinking or uncritical practice. The participants conceptually discuss Freire, feminism, neoliberalism, democracy, values, power, inequalities and more, as they engage with critical reflection and know ideologically what they are doing and why. The criticisms in the literature suggesting there is a deficit of community development practitioners who do engage with political, critical, reflective, thinking and theoretically grounded approaches are therefore somewhat weakened when scrutinising the practice represented in these dialogues. The significance of this leads to the conclusion that practitioners’ voices in dialogue deserve a legitimate place in expanding the theorisation of community development in literature. Furthermore, the clarity of the critical articulation of practice revealed through dialogue offers a depth of learning for those studying community development. The need for those studying community development to learn, develop and articulate clear ideological underpinnings to their practice is apparent.

There is much to learn from the detailed representations of practice that each dialogue reveals since the findings significantly reveal practitioners' perspectives as being grounded in clarity of purpose and political intent. They are all witness to social suffering and there is a sense across the board that the participants hope for fundamental social change, believe that it is achievable, that social inequalities are not inevitable, and that they each have a collaborative role to play in striving for change, though the essence and strength of this varies. Indeed, hope for better lives for individual people who endure social suffering prevails. The deep level of care for young people expressed by S and E in Dialogue 3 is central to their approaches, and the comments from U in Dialogue 1 about people putting out Christmas lights again is profoundly impactful in its depth of social comment. People matter as individuals and T and LA (Dialogue 2) are enduring in their belief that people in communities have equal worth and agency, and L and R (Dialogue 4) respectfully introduce us to women who are photographers, story tellers and change agents. However, people are not portrayed as individuals with problems or 'problem individuals' rather as people living lives that are blighted by social inequalities and challenging life circumstances. The articulation of practice in the dialogues demonstrably provides a respectful window into communities, lives, structural inequalities, and social suffering. This is also profoundly important for the learning processes in educating students about community development as these relationships of respect and mutuality, grounded in an understanding of the ramifications of social inequalities, that we see peppered throughout the dialogues are crucial to engagement but not simple to build.

The participants frame poverty, deprivation, and marginalisation as social inequalities rather than individual failings and most articulate an understanding of neoliberal market-led impacts on community work, on people in communities and on themselves. There is pragmatism, they are not engaged in naïve optimism (Freire 2016), but their thinking is consistently grounded in wider social justice intent, in effect they straddle an in-the-immediate with a

wider transformative approach. Practice is however not revealed as ‘either/ or’, it does not sit simply in a dichotomy of transformative or ameliorative, rather there are subtleties and nuances of practice that are supported by their critical thinking and by being conscious of their worldviews.

Some participants clearly have a feminist drive for gender equality, some engage with a class analysis, others are influenced by theology, and others follow an intersectional analysis striving for equality. The clarity around their values and ontological perspectives results in conceptual analyses that frame their approaches and their attitudes to social suffering and that helps hold their practice intentions in the realms of the ‘personal is political’ (Millet 1969). Differences exist and it is useful to note that for example, those with a feminist perspective clearly articulate the ‘personal is political’ (*ibid*) throughout, whereas those influenced by theology have a stronger focus on self-worth. Nonetheless, in all of the dialogues there is a prominent analysis of inequalities, oppression as structural, the nature of power and the importance of this to community development practice cannot be underestimated. Equally the importance of this forming a central part of the learning processes for those studying community development cannot be over stressed.

The commitment to striving for social change manifests in the dialogues in different ways. For some, there is clear action to impact on social policy, to educate politicians, to write books and educate through exhibitions, however for others, building countercultural community or engaging with campaigning evidences their drive. Whatever actions are presented as examples, it is evident that the participants are involved in collaboratively making the invisible visible in ways that require courage to impact from personal to structural levels. Consequently, the efforts to educate politicians, academics, and service providers about the violence inherent to women’s lives in prostitution sit alongside the actions to change substandard housing and the drives to enlighten funders. Whilst efforts vary,

ultimately, they are all committed to striving together to make a difference to people's lives, with consistent attempts to do that 'with' rather than 'for' and indeed to do so when the efforts are welcomed and respectful. Indeed, mutually making the hidden in plain sight ravages of social injuries visible in order to change them is revealed as the central premise of community development practice. This is the ultimate lesson for those studying, practicing, and theorising community development.

Courageous practice

The strong thread running through the dialogues that relates to the participants' drive to impact for positive social change is evidently undertaken within challenging circumstances. Fawcett's (1920: n.p.) much quoted words that 'courage calls to courage everywhere, and its voice cannot be denied' have a certain resonance here as community development is indeed revealed as courageous practice.

The participants portray their commitment to mutually bringing community perspectives to the fore, to creating community, to highlighting the realities of people's lived experiences, and significantly, to educating and challenging broadly for social change. This clearly manifests in different ways across the dialogues but the acts of speaking out are striking. Indeed, the participants never lose sight of their values and their commitment to working alongside people in communities to voice and act for change. The priority is the people in communities, they come first, it is about their stories, their truths, their lives, indeed their democratic processes and their agency. Quite simply, it takes courage to speak out, indeed it takes courage to act, but as Lorde (2007:33) articulates, the power of silence and of not speaking is disproportionately destructive:

> We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired. For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us. The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.

The drive to break the silences of social, economic, and political suffering underpins the actions represented throughout the dialogues. Courage has a place throughout them, it is evident in different ways, both explicitly and implicitly. There was undoubtedly courage in the hanging of a rainbow flag outside a Church of Scotland building, in developing relationships of love alongside violence perpetrated by angry young men, in occupying contradictory spaces that bring direct challenge to employers, in the hanging of a politically challenging exhibition at the Scottish Parliament, and in framing prostitution as violence against women whilst continuing to speak out about it in a context of stalking and online abuse. In this there are real and potential dangers to self that the participants are faced with, and it takes courage to counter them.

For some participants the impact on self was intense and it unfortunately resulted in ill-health, such are the pressures of acting for change in hostile environments. In a context riven with social inequalities and the resultant ramifications however, silence is not an option and the participants do indeed often muse that they have no choice but to act. For those studying community development, there is difficult learning here in knowing the painful realities of social inequalities and the resultant, at time also painful, compulsion to act that comes with community development practice. Care is needed in understanding the potential impact to self.

In offering up these words, Lorde (2007) also highlights that the acts of speaking out involve learning, particularly learning to see the processes of socialisation in society that silence and diminish. Indeed, change will not happen if they remain invisible. Evidently, such processes have been profoundly apparent in the dialogues and they are particularly illustrative of Gramsci's (1986) thinking around hegemony. There is indeed much reference throughout to the participants, and people in communities, striving to understand and challenge hegemonic forces that result in accepted, destructive common-sense assumptions in society.

Pointedly there is also courage in being open to learning and not staying in a place of professionally induced pretence as all-knowing. This learning is evident in different ways and notably as participant R (Dialogue 4) develops her feminist mandate and is openly reflective on her learning and politicisation through involvement in community development process. Additionally, however, this is evident through the actions of the 'well-kent face' as she, and others, politicise their experiences of sub-standard housing (Dialogue 1). More than that, there is also an openness to learning about limitations of practice and knowing the need to speak outwardly about homophobia to power (Dialogue 3). Being part of the learning that comes from seeing government-controlled spaces and hidden decision-making processes draw people towards actions, also further illustrates this (Dialogue 2). Indeed, the dialogues are rich with such examples and community development is revealed as learning for politicisation.

Notably courage is contagious, and this is represented as critical to community development practice. N reflects that their learning and 'levelled' actions in taking photos and speaking out influence the women's confidence to also voice (Dialogue 4). Meanwhile, the drive of the 'well-kent face' to speak up fuels the participants' work and further community involvement

and action. And, the courage of the women leading the bus campaign spreads it city-wide. Bauman (2001:125) reminds us that these kinds of activities involve 'stand[ing] up against the status quo' and require courage because of the 'awesome forces gathered behind it'. Strong ideological foundations of equity and mutuality drive and nourish the participants in their speaking out along with community members. In this they bring challenge to a perceived practice deficit in the literature that suggest practice all too often falls into amelioration and reinforcing the status quo.

Community development is revealed as courageous in other ways. There is indeed courage in working with flow, in embracing a 'not knowing' attitude, in allowing practice and actions to unfold and develop. This is crucial to practice grounded in mutuality and whilst it sits uncomfortably in a context dominated by service provision and marketisation, the flow and 'not-knowing' where developments will start, or finish, works when grounded in clear ideological thinking. It also takes courage to strive to build counterculture and to ground practice ideologically in love as 'an act of courage, not fear…a commitment to others' (Freire 2018:89), and as an ethic that commits to 'the right to be free, to live fully and well' (hooks' 2001:87). This is in essence evident throughout and manifests as a deep sense of commitment to the humanity, dignity, and agency of people in communities and their contributions to society.

Moreover, the participants' courage is fuelled by hope and a profound sense of caring about social suffering. Evidently, this can be a heavy weight and comes with a cost. They openly highlight the many challenges they face in their work, suggesting they are related to power and the impact of gender inequalities, class inequalities, ageism and the toxic reach of neoliberalism, hegemony, and social abjection. At times, they are frustrated, tired or angry but despite the very real challenges of striving to work in this way, the predominant thread throughout is of hopeful practice driven by an enduring commitment to tackling social

inequalities, to striving to make society a better place and a profound belief this is possible. T's words from Dialogue 2 reverberate across the dialogues as he states *See I don't know there's any choice.* Perhaps there is learning for all those involved in community development, studying or otherwise, here as it is represented as a social compulsion.

Sagacious relationships

A complex picture is revealed of community development grounded in relationships of respect, compassion, hope and sagacity. The attitudes to people in communities, and the relationships at the centre of the participants' community development practice are consistently emphasised across the dialogues and are basically revealed as grounded in respect and mutuality. Whilst the articulation of that varies from being partisan by nature to open expressions of love, the participants tend to see and experience the people in communities from an equitable premise and most notably as having expertise and knowledge.

Relationships in community development have been described as turning to others and 'disrupt[ing] self-orientation' (Westoby and Dowling 2013:22) and that is indeed evident in the dialogues. However, there is more and as community development is broadly agreed to have equity and mutuality at its core, the reality of equitable groundings to the relationships is revealed here in its complexity and significance. This approach both consciously, and ordinarily, pushes against everyday discrimination as it moves away from convoluted relationships of service provision to sagacious relationships. This is significant from the perspective of equity as well, as it stays away from the imbalanced 'needs' focus that Fraser's (2020) thoughts help illuminate. There is therefore an enduring awareness of the strength and critical capacities of people in communities both to take action, and to engage in democratic processes, community, learning and politicisation. This is revealed as a central

premise of practice and is one of the crucially important aspects of learning for community development students. Relationships grounded in sagacity allow for respect, learning, mutuality, and action. Understanding the nature of sagacious relationships as grounded in equity, knowledge and mutuality sustain practice in an approach that enables a process of action together towards politicisation and striving for social transformation. In effect without engagement in sagacious relationships there exists the probability of the agency of people being diminished in favour of relationships of service provision.

Indeed, the participants all reflect on their learning from being involved in community development and whether that is learning about people's knowledge and lived experiences, or learning about their practice approaches, the learning is often portrayed as coming from being in relationship, significantly though not exclusively, with people in communities. Relatedly, an openness to engaging in ways that are horizontal and do not assume superiority was a clear central thread across the dialogues. People are never defined in relation to the worker, they are not service users, they are women, men, young people and more, and the relationships are built on that premise, not one of charitable paternalism. In a world in which people in communities are treated as 'social abjects' (Tyler 2013), negatively defined by their experiences of poverty or deprivation, and regularly characterised by others, even name-called, this is highly significant. Pointedly, not only do the participants avoid such labels, they ardently challenge them. It therefore pushes against destructive 'social abjectification' (Tyler 2013), in a joint effort.

Indeed, sagacious relationships are central to the participants' roles on every level. Each dyad of participants stress that the strength of their own relationship is vital, and this involves ongoing support for each other. The dialogues are noticeably peppered with comments grounded in mutual respect and care for each other. Nonetheless, this is not confined to concern, the participants also bring critical challenges to each other's practice, sharing and

critiquing the values and theoretical perspectives that underpin it. Furthermore, the relationships are noted as important to their own well-being and this was both evident in the dialogues, quite significantly for some, but also obvious during the interview process. As Banks (2007) refers to community development as ‘uneasy practice’, we also see community development as difficult, challenging practice and the participants recognise that for and with each other. There is a reciprocal caring and learning, they all know the challenges of their work, the weight of knowing the realities of inequalities, of people’s daily experiences of social suffering, and of the desire, and push, for change.

This caring for each other is highly significant and is inextricably linked to the participants’ caring for community development practice, they know its fragility in a context dominated by service provision and neoliberal influences on policy, funding, and practice. Across the dialogues the caring between the participants was significant, indeed community development practice was made possible and sustained by their relationships.

The relationships theme however extends well beyond their engagement with each other and community members to an acknowledgement of the importance of relationships with other colleagues and wider partners including local, national, and international community workers, national and international networks, policy makers, politicians and academics. These sagacious relationships are notably key to their community development approaches and particularly to their understanding that change beyond community is required. They invite critical questioning, mutual learning, and advice in developing their work, in keeping it on track and in knowing the different actions that may be beneficial to undertake. Significantly however, these wider networks are crucial to the process of striving for social change, by working together, presenting at conferences, producing films, writing, raising awareness and educating. To varying degrees, the participants are all involved in wider education and social change processes with people in communities and their wider

networks. Some of the participants, notably N and R (Dialogue 4) in their engagement with women, but also U and L (Dialogue 1) in their political focus on housing, provide an undisputable picture of their work as striving for positive social change, in relationship.

Such a level of clarity of purpose and commitment to act together for social change could belie the representation of community development as contested practice that fuelled the need for this research and has prominence throughout the literature. Undoubtedly the participants' dialogues reveal a depth of practice that has similar intentions and approaches albeit in different contexts. The learning from the dialogues adds strength to the perspective of community development as political practice with transformative intent but it also presents community development as process and therein lies one of the contestations, community development has different guises. Further, the dialogues represent 'community' in many different ways, the concept at the core of community development is itself contested. Ideological groundings are equally contested, one dialogue reveals feminist perspectives on prostitution that others disagree with and whilst the contestations were one reason for undertaking this research, the aim was not to prove or disprove that. Community development remains contested with many contested concepts at its core, but this research reveals political, critical, caring, mutual, transformative community development in action and provides an important representation of dynamic practice. The eight dialogues reveal practice that undoubtedly adds to the theorizing of community development but there is a way to go before community development might be unchained from contestations. Further research using dyadic dialogical interviewing with a wider span of practice could add more to the debates. That said, the contestations need not be seen as a negative as the debates keep the theorising of practice alive.

Method matters

The research design was of import and the grounding in the democratisation of research was crucial to the successful representation of the complexity of practice. Indeed, the presentation of the participants' voices in the dialogues reveals nuances that would otherwise have been difficult to portray in such depth. Importantly, the research framework allowed me to hear the participants' voices and perspectives, in a way that would respect them as experts on their own practice with the ability to articulate that clearly. This meant the principles of equity and a belief in people's agency were a central premise and importantly, in line with the values and principles of community development, the use of dialogue as research process enabled a dynamic, engaged, conversational, mutual, meaning-making process. The conclusion regarding my research framework is that there is much to learn from the practitioners' perspectives on their practice and that the use of dyadic dialogical interviewing, combined with my analysis, allowed for a dynamic representation of their critical thoughts on their work. The result is a vivid representation of practice full of learning about community development and of central importance to this was the development of the dyadic dialogical interviewing that combined interviewing in pairs with emancipatory dialogue.

There are therefore important lessons to learn from the research methodology particularly from the development, and use of, dyadic dialogical interviewing. It is evident that the dyadic dialogical interviewing as a participatory method facilitated a depth of meanings and understandings and its use enabled the practitioners' perspectives to come to the fore as rich data. Furthermore, the presentation of the dialogues interspersed with my thinking, grounded in literature, allows for a complex picture to emerge of community development practice that is loving, critical, political, and courageously grounded in transformative social intent. The learning is multi-dimensional with each dialogue representing a journey of discovery and the result is a creative and vivid image of the participants' practice in all its

nuances. It is in the dialogues that the depth of community development practice and process is revealed.

Indeed, dialogue as a central concept brought depth and vitality, it enabled a meaning-making process with an eye on trustworthiness. The power of dialogue as a '[mutual] act of knowing… [with] individual dimension' (Freire 1987:3) was evident as the participants' individual voices were loudly represented in the dialogues along with the combined messages they create together. Importantly, dialogue also enabled a representation of people's experiences of social suffering in communities as their stories, knowledge and experiences were inextricably represented as part of the participants' narratives. In this way the dyadic dialogical interviews allowed for a journey from a starting point in which 'no one knows the full picture' (Beck and Purcell 2010:81-82), through a vivid reflective and engaged process, to a representation of practice that the participants and researcher created together. Moreover, dialogue enabled a representation of the social inequalities people in communities endure and the actions they engage with to challenge for change.

The vision of striving to create a dialogical space for practitioners to critique their practice was realised and I developed a legitimate research method that helped me to achieve positive results. Freire's thinking was central to my analysis, however not solely, because a feminist lens expands its relevance (Weiler 1991), and particularly so for this inquiry. Lorde's (2007) thinking, as well as hooks' (2001, 2000, 1993), was central to the analysis and the combined theoretical lens allowed for a dynamic critique. The influence of Adichie (2009) and Fraser (2020) further expanded my feminist critique and Tyler's (2013) analysis of social abjection along with Gramsci's (1975) thinking on hegemony were also central. The conceptual framework and the nature of my analysis of the dyadic dialogical interviews allowed me to draw on Ledwith's (2020, 2016, 2011) work on community development,

combined with a range of other contemporary writers to create a critical bank of theoretical perspectives for my analysis.

The participants' voices, my analysis and the literature sit alongside each other in dialogue rather than in hierarchy and this adds to the democratisation of social research by narrowing the gap between researcher, academy, and community.

Community development influences on the research process

The strength of community development is revealed in its actions towards uncovering social suffering and acting on it mutually. Equally it has an offering to the democratisation of social research. Much as community development practice creates a dialogical space of mutuality for social action, so dyadic dialogical interviewing creates a research process that embodies horizontal learning.

As a researcher with insider status, I navigated the territory between community development practice and social research, and this was an important part of the research process and in ensuring its successful outcome. In addition, feminist influences on social research (Deutsch 2004, Oakley1981), as well as the democratisation of social research (Edwards and Brannelly 2017; Crow 2012) enabled me to see that the researcher can inhabit a place of journeying with participants, and dialogue as an engaged meaning-making process duly provided me with a way forward. The articulation of the research framework with community development values and process offers something new with exciting potential for further research. The result is a research framework with a conceptual framework that included community development values and dialogue as a robust inquiry and meaning-making process.

In this way I can now invite celebration of what community development has to offer the research process and I see this as a crucial aspect of learning for critically minded community development students. Dyadic dialogical interviewing will not suit every qualitative researcher. It demands a values base and an approach that is grounded in mutuality. It asks for the ability to step out of traditional academic researcher as 'sole expert' roles into a place of belief that the participants have expertise and that by coming together something greater occurs, that has theoretical legitimacy. It does rely on a stepping back from ego, an ability to be led, to listen deeply and to work from integrity, whilst holding a strong presence. In effect, it mirrors elements of the sagacious relationship building highlighted by the participants in their community development practice. The real strength of this is that it offers a dynamic framework for community development research. The clarity of my research conceptual framework was crucial, but much as T states in Dialogue 2 the influence of community development means *you don't entirely know where the edges are*, and a certain amount of flow and fluidity was required.

There were indeed many interesting parallels with community development process in this research inquiry. As N said in Dialogue 4, she lived and breathed the women's stories, so did I with the participants' narratives. I read the dialogues again and again, I lived and breathed their words, I anonymised the dialogues, but I knew exactly who was speaking, I heard their voices whilst reading the transcripts. I went back to the participants for clarification using dialogue and I made changes whilst challenging myself not to lose sight of my wider analysis. The participants were accompanying me throughout the process, either in person or through their words in the dialogues and like N, I wanted to do them justice in my representation of their work. That was indeed a leveller for me, but as with community development process, it was not about 'anything goes', my presence and my analysis was important, it was not simply about retelling stories or presenting participants in a positive

light. Much as Horten's words in dialogue with Freire were relevant to T's practice, they resonate here for the research process:

> There's no such thing as just being a co-ordinator or facilitator, as if you don't know anything. What the hell are you around for if you don't know anything. Just get out of the way and let somebody have that space that knows something, believes something (Bell *et al* 1990:154).

As researcher, my knowledge and presence were evident along with my intention to engage in mutual process. Part of that involved the freedom to allow the dialogue to lead and for me to respond to the exciting unpredictability of where it took us. That meant that some of my analysis from literature was developed in response to what was said rather than being prescribed in advance, but my conceptual framework and my reflexivity held me within the research process. On reflection, perhaps, like community development practice, this research framework relied on a certain level of courage as it respectfully challenged traditional academia and in doing so allowed for a more democratic and horizontal approach.

Research limitations

There are limitations that come from the selecting of participants. I selected participants who I knew, or got to know, and this meant that the targeting relied on the nature of my network. I needed to be able to engage in dialogue with the participants and I believed that relied on a certain level of trust. My initial conclusions were that the dyadic dialogical interviews did require an already established trusting relationship, however that is more open to debate, and engaging with more interviews influenced my thinking. Whilst it is interesting to note that the participant who I knew least was the one who immediately and specifically requested to

review my representation of her dialogue, my openness to providing her with the participants' voices section, and to take feedback on it, is perhaps the crucial factor here. The conduct of the researcher in engaging mutually and respectfully is therefore the central consideration, rather than the requirement for a pre-existing relationship. This further opens possibilities for future research.

There are unanswered questions from this research. For example, the role of community development practice in challenging racism or ableism is not addressed in the dialogues, somewhat surprisingly. Neither is there any mention of environmental justice. Also, the focus on practice in Scotland, whilst having potential global implications for learning, is nevertheless a limitation - the research may have been enhanced by the sourcing of participants from other parts of the world. That however leaves space for further research.

Relatedly, the nature of the dyadic dialogical interviews means that the researcher responds to the participants in dialogue and this involves reflecting their comments and questioning them in process. The questions are not pre-determined, and it means that the picture that emerges is one of 'moments in time'. This is not problematic in itself because the depth of engagement creates rich data. However, it would be interesting to know the responses to a question such as 'how and whether the participants challenge racism'. We are left unknowing about this because they didn't touch on it and I didn't ask.

The small number of participants potentially limits the generalisability of the research findings, however as with many qualitative inquiries, the intention was depth rather than a broad-brush analysis of numerous participants' perspectives. The dyadic dialogical interviewing did indeed create a depth of data.

Concluding thoughts

This work has been a dynamic research process full of learning on many different levels. The dialogues reveal community development practitioners who are highly reflective, critical thinkers, articulate about the conceptual underpinnings of their approach and fully aware of the socio-political context they are operating in. They are indeed courageous and community development is revealed as dynamic, important, transformative practice. The dyadic dialogical interviews enabled their practice to be revealed in depth and this research further reveals the need for community development practice to be celebrated, cared for and its presence expanded. Dyadic dialogical interviewing takes its place as a legitimate research method and it is offered up to be used in different contexts or settings and with different communities.

Looking forward, my proposal is to consider the development of dyadic dialogical interviewing as a reflective practice tool. It was often been expressed by participants in the dialogues how positive their engagement in the dyadic dialogical interviews was. As R reflected in Dialogue 4, *this has been a really good reflection on the project,* and T asked in Dialogue 1, *can we do this every Friday?.* There was a real sense of usefulness for them in their participation in the dialogues with the realisation the challenges of practice were shared. Granted, the latter comment was made in humour, however the participants were animated and fully engaged throughout the lengthy interviews, indeed there was often laughter at the end in relation to the length of time spent talking. There was also undoubtedly a sense of realisation about the strength and depth of their work.

I see potential for dyadic dialogical interviewing to be used as an approach that could enable community development practitioners to dialogue on their practice with a third party and then critique it using their chosen perspectives from literature. Different approaches to the

analysis are possible, this could involve using the community development values as articulated by Banks (2019) to critique the dialogue, or Ledwith's (2020:243) 'seven steps to a radical agenda', or indeed hooks' (2001:87) 'love ethic', to name a few. However, there would also be possibilities for the analysis to spin around specific targeted questions such as how the practice is challenging racism, ableism, ageism, and homophobia, or how indeed the practice is challenging the wider structural forces in society. There may also be potential for this as a reflective practice tool for other disciplines, the difference would potentially be in the literature used for the analysis. There are potential merits in the introduction of this approach to the education processes for community development students. Firstly, as a reflective tool that could challenge their thinking and also as a research method that supports and encourages them to maintain community development values throughout social research projects.

I am left with Fraser's (2020) comments about the need for feminism to be bold and my final, and enduring, thought is to celebrate the boldness of community development represented across the dialogues. As dynamic, respectful, hopeful practice community development has a significant and important role to play in striving for positive social change and this is a call for an expansion of its presence in communities throughout Scotland and globally.

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Appendix 1 – Glossary: Scots to English

Aboot = about

Ane = own

Arnae = are not

Aye = yes

Cannae = can't

Closey door = shared entrance door

Couldnae = could not

Dae = don't

Dae ken = don't know

Daen = doing

Dandered = wandered

Didnae = did not

Dinnae = don't

Dinnae ken = don't know

Disnae = does not

Doon = down

Fae = from

Fowk/Folk = people

Gonnae = going to

Gies = gives

Hae = have

Isnae = is not

Jist = just

Ken = know

Ma = my

Mak = make

Maks = makes

Mingin = dirty & smelly

Naebuddy = no-one

Noo = now

O’ ma ane = of my own

Oor = our

Oot = out

Polis = police

Pus = face

Roon = around

Tae = to

Uhu = yes

Werenae – were not

Whit = what

Wi = with

Winnae = won’t

Withoot = without

Wisnae = was not

Wiz = was

Wouldnae = would not

Wur = our

Appendix 2 – Information and Consent Form

Participant Information and Consent Form

This form was emailed in advance to the participants and it was further explained and discussed at the beginning of the interviews. Participants signed once full explanation had taken place and only once they had the opportunity to ask questions that I answered. Ethical approval was granted for the use of this form by ESW ethics Committee, UoD.

Research Study title: Community development – an inquiry into practitioners' perspectives

Researcher: Jean McEwan-Short

Introduction

This research forms part of my Doctorate in Community Learning & Development. The aim of this inquiry is to investigate Community Development practice from practitioners' perspectives. Acknowledging that community development is contested practice with varying definitions (Craig *et al* 2011), my interest lies in studying how community development practitioners describe their approach to their work. This inquiry intends to provide a snapshot of contemporary perspectives on Community Development work in Scotland, what enables it, what hinders it and where it sits in the continuum of emancipatory to placatory practice (Ledwith 2016), from the perspective of the participants.

Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary.

If you choose to participate, you will be invited to take part in interviews in order to capture your perspectives on your approach to Community Development work. The interviews are a little different in that they are dialogical, and this will involve you being interviewed 'in dialogue' with another participant who is known to you. The dialogical interview basically involves you being interviewed together discussing your perspectives on your own community development practice and with me. The hope is that the dialogue will flow, I will reflect back some of the key points you raise as you go along, and I may ask you to expand on some of them so that I can gain a full picture.

I will listen to your perspectives on your practice, what you consider impacts on it and what you think, or do, about that. I will take written notes and I hope to record the interviews, however if you are not comfortable with being recorded, I will only take written notes.

Permission

Permission is sought for your participation in the study and this will involve:

- Engaging in two dialogical interviews. The first interview will create the picture of your perspectives on community development and the second interview will be used to check the meaning I have made from your first dialogical interview and allow you and the other participant to comment on it. (Each interview is expected to take at least 2 hours of your time).
- The interviews being recorded
- The research being published

Confidentiality

Any information you give will be treated with respect. The data gathered will be stored in a in a way that only I will have access to. Any paper data will be kept securely locked away and any recordings will be held in password protected files. Your information and participation will be confidential in that you will not be specifically named in the report.

It is expected that you will also respect the confidentiality of the other participant.

Report

The data collected will be analysed and it will form a report that is part of my doctoral thesis. It is also likely to be published in academic journals. Participants' names will not be disclosed in either.

Ethics

The researcher has approval from the Research Ethics Committee from the School of Education & Social Work, University of Dundee and is bound by their ethical guidance.

Consent

If you are happy with the above and you would like to participate, please sign the attached consent form.

If you would like further information, clarification or would like to ask any questions please contact me by email: j.mcewanshort@dundee.ac.uk or call me on 01382 381493.

Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project: Community development – an inquiry into practitioners' perspectives

Name of Researcher: Jean McEwan-Short

Please read the points below and respond as you choose.

Please sign below if you are happy to participate.

I confirm that I have read and understood the requirements of participation in this study and I have had the opportunity to ask questions. □

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. □

1. I agree to take part in the study □

2. I agree to the interviews being recorded □yes □no

3. I agree to data being stored in line with University of Dundee policy □

4. I accept the research may be published □

Name:

Signature:

Date: